

MOTHER INDIA

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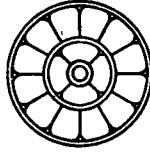
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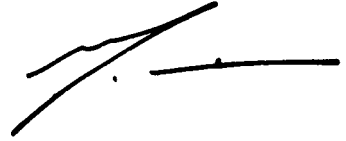


Lord, Thou hast willed, and I execute,

A new light breaks upon the earth,

A new world is born.

The things that were promised are fulfilled



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MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

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No. 3

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WORDS OF THE MOTHER

THE most dangerous thing for people to believe is that things cannot be worse for them.

*

Communism is of yesterday. The Communism of tomorrow will have the Divine as its centre.

28.12.1968

*

Disciple: I cannot accept all that happens with a calm heart.

This is, however, indispensable for Yoga; and he who has so great an aim as to be united with the Divine and to manifest Him, how can he be affected by all the futilities and foolishnesses of life?

*

To keep constantly a concentrated and in-gathered attitude is more important than having fixed hours of meditation.

*

When you are sure that you have attained absolute sincerity, you may be certain that you have plunged into falsehood.

*

The soul is that which comes from the Divine without ever leaving Him, and returns to the Divine without ceasing to be manifest.

29.9.1959

WORDS OF SRI AUROBINDO

THE Mother has never spoken of anything to be done in the next birth.
Naturally the vital has to be transformed if one is to succeed.

15 1 1934

*

It is this adhesion of the vital being that brings the full satisfaction and joy of the whole nature in the spiritual life. When that is there, it will be impossible even to think of returning to the ordinary existence.

28.2 1938

*

Ours is an integral mission, essentially religious and spiritual, but whose field for application is the whole of life. Our aim of aims is to change the whole human being into its divine type.

A TALK WITH THE MOTHER

IT was the 4th of October 1963, when I went to the Mother. I showed Her the message given by Her:

“What have you given to the Lord or done for Him that you ask the Mother to do something for you? She does only the Lord’s work.”

I wondered. What does the Lord want as He has everything, what can be done for Him, as He is capable of doing everything?

And here is the Mother’s reply:

“The Lord doesn’t demand anything except Surrender—your wish, your want, your will, your thoughts, feelings—you must offer to Him without reserve. And let His will, thoughts, feelings, wish and wants become yours. In fact, let His vibrations become your vibrations. Then there is no question of such miseries and troubles. You get the Lord and you get everything. But it can only be done when you surrender totally to Him and to Him only. Not otherwise. Well, I don’t say that the complete surrender is very easy. To give up everything is indeed difficult.

Nevertheless, give everything; your sorrows, pains, difficulties and sufferings to the Lord and tell Him: ‘These are Yours, take care of them, this is Your responsibility and not mine.’ Try this and you will find the difference. Surrender everything to Him and say: ‘Thee, Thee, only Thee, O Lord.’

The soul who is the delegate of the Divine, represents the Divine. It tries to gather the whole being’s substance together and to offer it to the Divine for transformation. The soul is a portion of the Divine. And the sufferings of the soul are always in proportion to its strength. These sufferings and pains are not only for the soul but for the whole world, because nothing is separate—the whole world is One single thing. When beings suffer, the world suffers, the soul suffers and the Divine suffers too. But the Lord doesn’t want anybody to suffer. He wants everyone to be happy. It is the human beings who make things difficult.

This Mother—(*pointing to Herself*)—has a physical body with only two hands, two eyes and so on... But Her Consciousness is Vast. She sends answers at once without opening people’s letters. But unhappily, most of the people are not aware and cannot receive Her answers, Her Force, and Her Consciousness. Otherwise, the work would be easier for the Mother. However, Her work is to lead everyone to his goal.”

And when I questioned: “This rough, ugly and wretched world—would it

ever become a perfect golden divine World?"

The Mother's answer is:

"It is bound to be because it *cannot* be otherwise."

Further She said:

"This world is a condensation of energy; what we human beings see—animals, trees, plants etc. etc., are merely a condensation of energy and nothing else. Recently scientists have tried to find out all about the material world and have come to the conclusion that everything is made of elementary particles (electrons, protons) that are nothing but condensed energy, energy is really conscious energy and behind everything there is only the One, the great Conscious Power, the Supreme who holds everything in Him and wills to carry everyone to his Goal and to manifest Himself in all, and thus the world ought to become only He Who is everything."

(One of the unpublished talks given to Huta by the Mother)

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(Courtesy *Gavesanā*, February 1990, pp 27-28)

VOLUME II OF

Glimpses of The Mother's Life

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Edited by K. D. Sethna—WITH MANY PICTURES—PRICE: Rs. 35/-

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BITS OF BANTER FROM THE GOOD OLD DAYS

From Amal to Sri Aurobindo

THAT incorrigible Nirod has a chronic habit of misquoting me. He garbles my words, misreads my corrections, attributes to me opinions I am quite innocent of!¹

A few weeks back he coolly told me that I had definitely declared that Milton had written his “Paradise Lost” from the Overmind! Of late he was showing signs of improvement—but just last night he attributed to me that impossible Latin “gaudumus”!²

Mehercule!² what’s to be done with that fellow? (24 5 1937)

From Sri Aurobindo to Amal

He ought to be sentenced to penal servitude—let us say, condemned to produce at least 14 lines of overhead poetry without the means to do it and then abused for not doing it. It is the only proper and sufficient inconsequent punishment for such inconsequence.

*
**

From Amal

In line 2 of the poem I have sent up, “utter” seems quite a clutter after “batter” of the previous line and “but” in the same. Is it advisable to substitute “perfect” for it? (15 5.1934)

From Sri Aurobindo

“Utter” and “batter” may be a clutter and a clatter but “perfect” is much too flatter. So find something else which will fit more inevitably into the matter.

From Amal

Though leaning on the right side of meaning, the flatness of “perfect” may still blur fact, making the triumph too Pyrrhic, but surely “giant” is stronger and yet more pliant to the needs of my rousing lyric. However, if I am mistaken, even this can be forsaken.

¹ The correct form is in the well-known expression “Gaudeamus igitur” (“Therefore let us rejoice ”)

² A Latin exclamation, meaning “By Hercules!”

SRI AUROBINDO AND PONDICHERRY
IN
THE ELECTRONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA (TM)

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In our January issue we published under "New Age News" compiled and presented by Wilfried the deliverances of six encyclopaedias on Sri Aurobindo. Here we are adding those of a seventh, the most recent publication of this kind. They have been provided by Shri Suresh Hundocha under two headings, each by a different writer.)

Aurobindo, Sri

{aw-roh-bin'-doh, sree}

Sri Aurobindo, or Aurobindo Ghose, b. Aug. 15, 1872, d. Dec. 5, 1950, was an Indian nationalist and one of India's most original philosophers. He was educated at Darjeeling and in England, where he read classics at Cambridge. During a teaching career in Baroda and Calcutta, he became active in political affairs. As a result of his participation in efforts to free India from British rule, he was imprisoned in 1908. After his release he retired (1910) to PONDICHERRY to found an ashram (retreat) that became one of the chief religious centers of India. Assisted by Mira Richard, known as the Mother, he lived there continuously until his death.

According to Aurobindo's philosophy, cosmic salvation involves both an evolution and an enlightenment. On the one hand, humanity evolved from matter to the present stage of development called mind and is now in the process of moving to a higher state of supermind, or divinity. On the other hand, human enlightenment and energy come from above. Through Aurobindo's system of YOGA, called Integral Yoga, evolution and enlightenment blend to form the true gnostic (see GNOSTICISM).

The ashram at Pondicherry attracts thousands of pilgrims and students from all over the world. Its most ambitious effort is the building of Auroville, a new city nearby, to accommodate and enlarge the educational and community-service activities of the movement. Aurobindo's writings include *The Life Divine* (1940) and *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948).

KARL H. POTTER

Bibliography: Gandhi, Kishore, ed., *Contemporary Relevance of Sri Aurobindo* (1973); McDermott, R., ed., *The Essential Aurobindo* (1973)

Pondicherry

{pahn-di-chair'-ee}

Pondicherry (French: Pondichéry) is a union territory of India situated on the Coromandel coast of the Bay of Bengal. The population of 570,000 (1979 est.) is mostly Tamil-speaking and Hindu. The city of Pondicherry is the capital. The manufacturing of cotton textiles, trade in peanuts, oil seeds, and cotton cloth; and the cultivation of rice are the principal economic activities. Aurobindo Ashram, a devotional retreat in the city of Pondicherry established by the philosopher Sri Aurobindo before World War II, attracts visitors from all over the world. The city of Pondicherry was established by the French as a trade center in 1674. During the 18th century the British frequently disputed French control, but Pondicherry remained a French possession until 1954, when it became part of India.

ASHOK K. DUTT

A BIRTHDAY BOUQUET

TO AMAL KIRAN ON 25 NOVEMBER 1990

DEAR Muse, companion of my dreaming hours,
Gather me violets huddled under hoods:
On Amal's birthday let us send him flowers,
Bluebells and daisy-chains from English woods.

Send to him snowdrops that the sun's cool kiss
Fathered in mossy glades before the spring;
A riot of poppies scarlet in the grass;
And every fragrance that the warm winds bring

From roses after rain—with clarion daffodils,
First in the van of summer, celebrate this day,
And golden buttercups from Sussex hills!
All these dispatch to Amal, that he may

Look down upon a Pondicherry street—
Yet see an English garden at his feet.

SONIA DYNE

LIFE—POETRY—YOGA

A PAIR OF PERSONAL LETTERS

I WAS delighted to get your poem for my birthday, all the more because it brought a breath of England with its conjuration of flowers from Sussex hills and woods on the music of a language which is part of my inmost being. There is a slight touch of early Milton and a half-hint of Shakespeare in the verbal turn here and there, but both are taken up most felicitously into the quintessential You, and this taking up is all the richer because of that faint waft of the past, which I love, mingling with the air of the England your dear self carries into my heart. I have particularly in mind the phrases—remarkable in both image and rhythm—

Send to him snowdrops that the sun's cool kiss
Fathered in mossy glades before the spring;
A riot of poppies scarlet in the grass;
And every fragrance that the warm winds bring
From roses after rain—with clarion daffodils,
First in the van of summer, celebrate this day....

The day was very well celebrated with Indian flowers blending in my sight with the memory of your lines.

Now my eighty-sixth year has been completed. I expect I shall see at least my ninety-fourth year to find out the full drift of a letter Sri Aurobindo dated in such a style that 1928 read quite distinctly as 1998. If in these eight more years I can bring out the eighteen books still lying unpublished in my cupboard I shall have covered my literary life-work—provided I beware of writing any further books during that period and creating the necessity of living yet longer to see them through the press. But can I remain unproductive all that time—and how much further lease of life can I hope for beyond 1998? Actually I have no sense of how short or how long could be the period of my continuation on earth. Some people feel at a certain age that their life's work is done. I am referring, of course, not to people who feel fulfilled when their grandchildren are grown up or when they have amassed a good fortune for the future family to thrive upon or when their ambitious careers have been crowned with success. I am referring to those who are not of the common run, people who carry in their bones the drive of some great mission. Milton, for instance, who knew he had been born for a worthwhile poetic creation. I believe Dante too had to wait for the *Divine Comedy* to emerge. After this poem's music had come to rest with

l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle
(The love that moves the sun and the other stars)

its author must have been quite resigned to end his life of unhappy exile far from his beloved Florence, just as after waking up one of his daughters at some odd hour of the night to take down the dictation of the lines—

They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow
Through Eden took their solitary way—

the blind revolutionary Puritan, fallen on evil days and evil tongues in Restoration England, could not have cared much whether his own “solitary way” went further on or not. I have no intuition of having to wind up some *Paradiso* or *Paradise Lost*. But you are right in believing that on the literary side the Amal of Sri Aurobindo has reached his goal essentially in the considerable mass of his poetic expression. I can’t be sufficiently grateful to you for making possible the publication of this mass in the near future. However, for two reasons I wouldn’t feel my days quite rounded and ready to close when my volume sits proudly on the shelves of my Lady Bountiful.

One reason is that the literary life-force in me breaks out in many directions and finds satisfaction even in such a fantastic-seeming project as *The Beginning of History for Israel*. The other is that Sri Aurobindo, while giving a tremendous push to the writer in me, has yet so moulded my being that the main urge of my life is to be the disciple of his Integral Yoga and to go on and on in realising his immensity of light and his profundity of bliss in both inner and outer living—and these too not in one single mode but in a multitude of manners. Channelling the Aurobindonian inspiration in various lines of literary activity is surely my nature’s bent, but still more is it its bent to let the Aurobindonian revelation stream forth through all the thousand and three movements of my being in thought and word and deed from hour to hour. My first preoccupation is always to answer in pulsing reality the questions: “Does the Supreme Master’s presence suffuse every attitude of mine? Does the presence of the Divine Mother manifest itself in all my relationships with fellow-creatures?” Since the goals of the old spiritual paths are regarded as no more than stepping-stones in the Integral Yoga, the drive of a perpetual seeking in which God

is no fixed paradise
But truth beyond great truth

leaves the future grandly indeterminate for one and raises up in one the strange idea that one has to live for ever. It is not a question of clinging to life—something deeper, wiser, quieter than one’s own heart seems to lead one onward and sees no discernible end. Should one speak of a sense of immortality on earth? That may hardly sound reasonable. Perhaps one can speak of what the Rigveda calls “the Immortal in the mortal” standing awake in one all the time? Possibly

the feeling is present that one has lived innumerable past lives and is going to have life after future life on earth securely in the transforming hands of our Gurus? I can't tell. All I know at this instant is that an all-pervading peace appears, in a far-away manner, to hold me at its core and that I am caught, however faintly, in some eternal Now.

Enough of what Yeats, unable to look further than his nose and yet turning it up, dubbed "Asiatic vague immensities". Let me attend to the fine letter you wrote to me just before flying to England.¹ Your answers to the question how poetry is produced are excellent. They are a "Yes" to several possibilities, as poetry comes in many ways: the central truth is that it "comes" and is not made by the surface intelligence—"the thinking mind", as we call it. And, of course, this implies that a poem "pre-exists" and there are, as you say, "the great wordless thoughts", but these movements of the higher conceptions and perceptions represent, as another phrase of Sri Aurobindo's cited by you has it, "the rhythmic sense of hidden things". Not words as such but a meaningful rhythm which can be communicated in the form of words in any language has to be part of the original inspiration. To turn a phrase of Swinburne's to my use, I should speak of "very sound of very light". And this sound is both of particular significances and of overall suggestions. When caught in language, the inspiration is not only in individual words but also in their general order and in special combinations. Let me pick out the line you have quoted from Meredith:

¹ My dear Amal,

We tried once to find a mutually satisfying form of words to describe what poetry is—do you remember? Now your last letter seems to challenge me to say how it is produced—sudden inspiration flowing effortlessly into song? The infinite capacity for taking pains? A little bit of both?

In a letter to a young man who had sent examples of his work, Walter Scott described poetry as a 'knack'. He didn't seem to set much store by it, either, and advised the aspiring poet to apply himself to a worthwhile profession! Perhaps it was a tactful way of telling the young man that he had no talent. On the other hand, to a writer like Walter Scott, poetry may well have seemed to be no more than a 'knack' with words. I can imagine Rudyard Kipling, for example, saying the same. Sri Aurobindo dismissed Kipling as a clever versifier, not a poet, and he may have dismissed Scott in the same way. Yet, few critics have attempted to make the distinction that Sri Aurobindo makes, and for the reading public in general there is no distinction to be made (between poetry and mere verse) that does not depend upon subject matter and style.

You and I both agree that poetry is "received by the thinking mind". It follows that whatever is simply a product of the thinking mind, however elegantly phrased and irrespective of its outward form, is not "real" poetry. Stated bluntly like that, the truth I am trying to express is greatly reduced, I know. I would not like to have to define what I mean by "thinking mind", or to state how poetry—which after all is language, the very vehicle of thought—can be "received", as if it existed, unexpressed, apart from the language in which it is expressed. Yet I do believe this.

I do not want to be prescriptive, and if I had never tried to write poetry myself I would not dare even to express an opinion. I am guided by my own experience and intuition. Once I asked a friend, a sculptor, how he was able to carve a head (a perfect likeness of the subject) out of a block of stone. He told me that he 'saw' the head, as if already existing within the block, waiting to be uncovered. He did not "create" it—it was there already in its final form—the process was one of gradual and patient discovery. This is how I see a poem—as pre-existent, waiting for the poet who will discover it. I do admit that the discovery may require a long labour or it may not. The point at issue is that the process is one of *discovery* (although we call it *creation* because it seems to us that when we discover what is, we build). If we were not so tangled up in time, if our yearning for

How slowly does the skein of time unwind.

No doubt, what immediately strikes us is the word “skein”—though I am not sure whether your “curved” space-time of relativity physics and your “double helix” of the DNA molecule are quite relevant or invest “skein” with extra insight. Can we even say that these phenomena of macrophysics and microbiology have any “unwinding” shade in them? The basic insight of Meredith’s metaphor simply is: “Hardly do events and circumstances yield their true meanings at once, and often the meanings are manifold: their tangle rarely grows clear all round in a brief while.” “Skein” is indeed the *mot juste* for this truth, by its touch of concrete imagery no less than by its figurative connotation. But it acquires its full force only by being part of a rhythmic whole of sound to convey the sense. The opening foot—a spondee with long stressed vowels—reinforces its sense by its sound: the delay in the skein’s unwinding is driven subtly home through the ear at the very first step of the poet’s perception. Similarly, the final word “unwind”, both by its utter proximity to “time” and by its containing the same long accented *i* as that word, as well as by its standing where it does, becomes specially effective in a conclusive manner to suggest that the function indicated gets carried out. The total interconnected impression the line makes would be lost if the ensemble were reshuffled to something like:

the future equalled our nostalgia for the past, surely we would see the process of artistic creation with different eyes

I will admit that I do not believe in the necessity of hard labour. Something in me has always rejected the ancient biblical prophecy (or curse) “in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread” For this was not said until Adam had been driven out of paradise, and therefore we infer a prior blessed state, natural to man as he was first made, in which he does not labour. Now in that blessed state—in that *supramental state*, one might say (looking forwards instead of backwards)—would there be a limbo-state between perception and perception perfectly expressed in language (the future poetry) a limbo-state filled with hard labour?

I am not trying to say that labouring at a poem makes it less a product of Hopkins’ “sweet fire”. Often we have to wait and strain for the felicity that surprises us (we know it is not ours by right) and enchants us with “the rhythmic sense of hidden things”

For what, after all, is the object of all our “doing and undoing”, as you, quoting Yeats, have put it in your letter? Isn’t it to keep clear the channel by which inspiration entered? The inevitable word, when we find it, is transparent—the light behind shines through. When we reject a word, isn’t it because it somehow blocks that channel? When Meredith wrote

“How slowly does the skein of time unwind”

he found an image that cannot be replaced by any other—one feels this, but it can’t be explained. Do you think he laboured to find “skein of time” or did the image impose itself, so many years before physicists began to speak of space/time as a curve, before the discovery of the shape of the DNA molecule—(a skein seems to be one of nature’s basic shapes)—did the image impose itself because it embodied a truth, and the channel was clear? If Meredith had pondered over his image, he may have “undone” it and substituted something more conventional. Often the thinking mind rejects inspiration, not recognising it for what it is.

Keeping the channel clear—that is labour enough and slowing down the dance of “inspiration’s lightning feet” because we cannot write fast enough! If we succeed, and “the great wordless thoughts” leave their impress, their *au revoir* on an image, on the rhythm of a phrase—I call that poetry! But who knows this better than you?

The skein of time—how slowly it unwinds.

or

The skein of time—how slow is its unwinding.

The initial suspense, the delicate atmosphere of discovery, the rhythmic and verbal reflection of the meaning unfolded—all these are missing. Merely the metaphor of “skein”, however apt an inspiration, will not create authentic poetry unless it is an organic element in an inspired order of significant words.

I don't know whether Meredith got his line straight away or after trying out some such versions as I have offered for comparison. As for the “skein”-image, I don't think he laboured to find it. It must have imposed itself.

Your idea that a true poem “pre-exists” is quite correct in the sense that what flows through the poet's pen is something that has hailed from beyond his scribal consciousness. He has found it, not put it together. But all poems cannot be said to pre-exist in the very form they take through that consciousness. There are works which are of one consistent shining tissue: *e.g.*, Shelley's “Skylark”. But some poems seem to vary in the texture of their parts. All the parts may be of equal artistic excellence and yet they may derive from different “planes” and cohere only in what I may term a subtle aura just beyond the poet's receptive mind. He may have got stuck at some point and when he resumed writing, though the theme was not changed, the style of expression was from another “plane” than the one he had started with. Then the resultant whole cannot be considered to pre-exist in its entirety from the start. It is a fusion of disparate pre-existences—elements drawn from more than one source of creation to serve a single thematic purpose. Here is no question of varying intensities of expression: everything is equally intense, but the intensities are not all of the same mode of revelation. Let me give you an example

EVANESCENCE

Where lie the past noon-lilies
 And vesper-violets gone?
 Into what strange invisible deep
 Fall out of time the roses of each dawn?
 They draw for us a dream-way
 To ecstasies unhour'd,
 Where all earth's form-hues flicker and drop,
 By some great wind of mystery overpowered.

In this example what Sri Aurobindo has designated as the “overhead” plane of Intuition is active with its sudden disclosures which are subtle yet go straight into our minds and prove completely convincing. Yes, there is only one plane at work but it operates in two distinct dimensions. If it had continued in one dimension

throughout, the poem would have been of a piece and the whole said to have a pre-existence. Evidently the last two lines bring a different turn of sight—a vision less vivid and direct, a more spread-out thought-touched though still light-swept eye is at play. It is as if the poet could not sustain the “occult” or “magic” vein, so enchantingly profound, and opened himself to a region more familiar to him: the Illumined Mind of Sri Aurobindo’s overhead series. The inspiration from the Intuition got latched on to this more familiar, even if intrinsically rare, region and brought forth a pure intuitivised snatch from it, no less fine as sheer spiritual poetry than the charmed outbreak from the in-world he had tapped earlier, but constituting a poetic pre-existence different from the one which that in-world had yielded in the six opening lines.

I am sure your sensitive aesthetic ear will understand why, while granting poetic pre-existence, I am led to a less simple notion of it than would occur to one at first blush

My own style of composition is a mixture of swift and slow—precipitation and pause—except in the poems of *The Adventure of the Apocalypse* where for three exultant months there was almost a constant leaping out of phrase after flashing phrase. There was also a start-to-finish movement, whereas ordinarily I may begin anywhere, occasionally in the middle of a poem and sometimes even at the end of it, and work my way to revelatory significances before or after! A seed of light, as it were, falls into my mind with the thrill of a basic suggestion calling to be unravelled in many shades which yet are a unity like a swirl of various planets with a single sun at its centre. The perfectionist critic in me is never at rest until he can have the sense of a radiant whole. (27.11.1990)

*

By now you must have received my letter of the 27th November. As it was long overdue in reply to yours of September 28th, written on the eve of your flight to England for over a month. I was in a hurry to post it. So, after my reflections apropos of my completing 86 years on 25 November, I went on to discuss the questions you had raised about poetry. In doing this I omitted a very important occurrence connected with my statement: “All I know at this instant is that an all-pervading peace appears, in a far-away manner, to hold me at its core and that I am caught, however faintly, in some eternal Now.”

As soon as I had written these words the peace which I had spoken of came forward from the back of my consciousness, made the centre which it had in my little self a spreading glow, at once intense and soothing, what I can only call an omnipotent softness. It permeated my whole being, my entire body and I was immediately a new person.

The newness had a particular relevance as well as a general one. I have dwelt on both in a couple of letters to friends. I wish to repeat my account to you

who most deserve to have it since you were the direct occasion of my experience.

My birthday had passed as usual with several fellow-Ashramites dropping in with their warm smiling faces. There was an atmosphere of happiness. But in one respect this birthday was a little different from my past ones. It had fallen in the midst of a period of indisposition—a fortnight during which I had a persistent low fever accompanied by a constant unease in the stomach. For more than two days the stomach refused to let any food in. I was reminded of the time—17 years earlier—when I had gone to Bombay for my first cataract-removal. Some time after the operation I contracted a fever and a great malaise in the stomach as if an ogre had been sitting there and refusing all nourishment. My nephew who was a doctor in that hospital swept me out of the place and took me home. The illness went on for more than a week. Medicines made it worse. During that period a passive prayer to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother went on—passive because there was just a turn towards them with no explicit call for intervention. When conditions looked as though there were a hidden form of typhoid at work, suddenly one evening, around 8 p.m., I saw with my closed eyes a fist come down with great force behind me on the right side of my body and at once the ogre was pushed out of my stomach and the fever vanished. The same night I had a dream of the Mother walking on her roof-terrace and I myself standing in the street below. A tremendous wave of emotion went up to her from me—such as I have never known at any time in my waking hours. During my latest illness I had made a definite appeal to our Gurus to rid me of the fever and the stomach-upset. But nothing took place until the day I wrote to you. Then with that momentous sentence the fever and the general discomfort in the body were just washed away. I suspended my typing for a minute or two, lost in that glowing softness of utter tranquillity in which I was plunged literally from head to foot. Then I returned to my typewriter.

The sense of “some eternal Now” stayed outward for a few hours, delicate and yet most concretely invasive—then gradually receded into the background without disappearing. The work it did directly in the body is a settled thing: I am cured and healthy.

Today is the fortieth anniversary of one of the most significant days in the Ashram’s history: December 5, 1950, when Sri Aurobindo left his body. The message distributed this morning is a prayer by the Mother:

“Grant that we may identify ourselves with Your Eternal Consciousness so that we may know truly what Immortality is.”

I feel that in a remote and passing way what the Mother wants us to have was borne into me by a sudden breath of her grace on the fateful November 27.

(5.12.1990)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

THE ASHRAM CHILDREN AND SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE

A DREAM-DIALOGUE

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1991)

SRI AUROBINDO went on: "I have briefly recounted to you how the *Bande Mataram* paper grew to become the mouthpiece of the Nationalist Party and brought about very many changes. I shan't go into all the details since I think you are still too young to understand the complexities of politics. All I can say is that the programme of work which Gandhi later undertook, that of lighting the flame of freedom in the masses, had already been initiated by us. We had prepared the people psychologically for freedom, and shaken the foundation of British imperialism in the country. In schools and colleges, it was we who started Boycott—a word which we were the first to use—and Passive Resistance, as well as non-acceptance of British justice and of British goods. In short, it was, in Gandhi's words, 'non-violent non-cooperation'. Simultaneously, in the *Yugantar* were published articles on the need for Revolution. Thus we began a conflict on two fronts: with the authority of the government as well as with the Moderates and their loyalty towards the British. For these reasons both the paper and the National Party became very influential, well-known and powerful all over the country. In the history of Indian journalism I believe no other paper has even equalled the dramatic impact that the *Bande Mataram* had on the mind of the nation preparing it for radical and revolutionary changes.

"You children will perhaps find it impossible to understand, to imagine even, the state the country was in before the National Movement began. The sight of a single white man would make people cower and cringe, and if there were any Red Turbans—Indian policemen—around, then the children ran panic-stricken for their lives. The land was as though peopled by sheep! And what drew them out of this abysmal fear and cowardice and stupidity and inertia? What brought into their lives a new courage and light and valour? It was the cry of 'Bande Mataram', it was this call that shook them awake. This was the greatest gift the *Bande Mataram* gave to India, a gift that Gandhi made full use of in his Quit India Movement. The fiery writings that the paper published, together with the revolutionaries' bombs, had created an all-pervading atmosphere in the country which, if it had happened anywhere else in the world, would have led to a mass uprising of tremendous violence. I will relate to you two instances that will describe the state of mind of the average Indian. A young man, having shot a police officer, was running away. But he had forgotten to rid himself of his revolver. An ordinary shopkeeper by the roadside noticed this and shouted out to him—'The revolver! Throw away the revolver! Throw it away!'

"The other is an incident that took place in the Howrah Station. An

Englishman assaulted an Indian boy. The little fellow shouted out 'Bande Mataram'. Immediately the cry was picked up by voice after voice and 'Bande Mataram'—'Bande Mataram' rang out from all sides. As the crowd round him grew, the sahib took fright and ran for his life. There are so many similar stories. All of you have heard of Bagha Jatin of the tiger-fight, your Tejenda's father. Brave young men like him and his companions all got their training in our secret Revolutionary Party."

"But it is impossible to believe that you could ever have taken recourse to violence and bloodshed?"

"Is that so? And why, may I ask?"

(*Shyly*) "I don't know. Perhaps because I feel that you love everyone so much that you care for all of us. And anyway, God can't kill anyone."

"Oh! So God is non-violent! My boy, do you think He runs the whole world without ever having to shed blood? That wars, killings and violence are only a cruel human game? Look, have you read the Gita? Have you heard about Sri Krishna who was an Avatar? And do you know what he says? He says that he is born, that God is born, in age after age, to uphold the Good and to destroy the Evil. Was it not Sri Krishna who turned Kurukshetra into a huge playfield of death, who destroyed the Kauravas? And what about Mother Durga, Kali? No, no, God is certainly not against violence, if it becomes necessary. He even takes up arms himself. I think you have been influenced by Christian ideas.

"But my political battle was not born of any personal dislike or disgust for the British. Neither was Sri Krishna's, for that matter. To fight against the enemies of one's country in order to ensure her greater good and welfare is never wrong."

"In *Letters to Mrinalini* you have described how a son feels when he sees a demon sitting astride his mother's breast, drinking her life-blood. Did you really consider India to be your mother?"

(*Laughs*) Consider! If the country, to me, were a mere geographical entity, just a collection of fields and forests, of mountains and rivers where lived a few million good, bad and indifferent people, do you think I would have imperilled so many people's lives, including my own? I am not a mere materialist. That my motherland was indeed my mother was to me a truth I had experienced. I loved her, I worshipped her just as you worship the Mother in our Ashram. The land is as living as your breathing bodies, as dynamically alive. Otherwise patriotism makes no sense."

"But during the Second World War, you supported the British, the self-same British!"

"That is so. And don't you know why? Firstly, you must understand that I had no grudge against the British as a people. I have never had any personal dislike or hatred for any individual or nation. We fought a political battle against a government and its laws, which, like that demon, were drinking our Mother's blood. When I realised that England and her government were fighting against a

great demoniac power, I sided with her. Hitler represented a dark force whose diabolical intention was to drink the life-blood of the whole world and it was the English alone who stood out against him. Our patriotism was then no longer confined to India alone but encompassed all earth and wished for universal good. There is nothing contradictory in this. Also, very few people realised in those days that if Hitler won the War it would be a hundred times worse for India. Do you understand?"

"We would like to know something more about the revolutionaries, if you please."

"Still more?"

"Yes. We've been told about the bombs the revolutionaries made to kill the British officers and even the Indians who worked for the British. We have also heard about armed attacks and raids. Were they true? And were you the leader of those men?"

"You mean, did I encourage them to loot and murder?"

"No, it's not that. But isn't revolution necessarily violent?"

"No, it is not quite so. Haven't I already explained to you what I meant by 'Revolution'? Its aim was to prepare a national armed uprising and rebellion. A few random murders and killings were not part of my plan or work. Of course, one cannot categorically state that the role played by terrorism was useless. You see, the situation was somewhat like this—among the many revolutionary groups, Barin's became the predominant one. Of course he kept me informed about his plans, consulting me or asking for my advice whenever he found himself in a difficult situation. But usually the rebel leaders had faith in their own judgment and wished to take the responsibility for their own decisions. I respected that. When the various groups began to become too numerous, I found it impossible to be in touch with all of them or to coordinate their plans. All I could do was to meet the leaders from time to time or when the situation required me to. On the other hand, we were passing through dire financial straits. Wealthy and influential members of our society were unwilling to help us. So naturally the only recourse was banditry and violence. This was risky, of course, the most dangerous aspect being the fear of losing the people's sympathy for our cause. But there was no other way. Alas, the Swadeshi Movement had made the Government terribly agitated and afraid, because of which a reign of terror was unleashed on us. School and college students were often fined, expelled, thrown into prison, punished, even publicly whipped and when these reached extreme proportions the revolutionaries decided that something had to be done to counter them. Almost as though terrorism was thrust upon the political revolutionary as his weapon. It was decided that all high officials, white or otherwise, of the government, be they police officers or governors, must become targets for assassination. The political rebels had already begun making bombs, but now in retaliation to the British repression Barin decided to kill

either the Governor or the Magistrate. The bomb was made ready for this, so was the group of young men. Hence it was that the first bomb was burst in a public place, but, due to a mistake, it was an English woman who died. There was a terrible hue and cry all over the country. This was how the terrorist movement started in India, growing progressively stronger and more widespread, generating throughout India a fiery and vibrant patriotism unimaginable to you today."

"But you did not approve of this movement, we are told."

"No, that is not quite true. What I did not agree with was all the petty gangsterism and the indiscriminate killings of the whites. All that had no part in our Revolution, according to me."

"Why did you not stop them?"

"I don't think a strong popular uprising ought to be checked, because it may have very positive results. That was the mistake committed by the Non-cooperation movement. As it was, many of the leaders found themselves obliged to take recourse to this path of violence, since they could find no other satisfactory alternative. It shook the people awake, no doubt, but at the same time it destroyed temporarily the force of active and violent resistance."

"How was that?"

"Because the police opened their eyes, becoming aware that a great national uprising was growing. Some of the high officials believed that I was the brain behind the killings. Twice they arrested me for my 'seditious' articles in the *Bande Mataram* but failed to punish me since the Law pronounced me innocent. According to the Government authorities, who but I could have such a clever cunning brain that could work out this complex network of plots of which even their most alert police officers had not had the least inkling? Almost in despair, they sent spies and search parties in every direction and that is how, one day, they discovered the bomb-making factory at the Maniktolla Gardens. Barin and his companions were immediately arrested, and so was I. I remember how my very pleasant early morning sleep was rudely shattered by a police officer and I was taken into custody. This, in short, is the history of our terrorist activity."

"So you had set up a bomb-making factory at the Maniktolla Gardens?"

"No, it wasn't I. And one could hardly call it a factory! It wasn't anything even like our "Harpagon" Workshop. Just an old abandoned tumble-down building where worked about a dozen boys. More often than not, these fellows used foul means rather than fair ones to procure the ingredients for making bombs."

"Such a small set-up?"

"Not small at all, quite big in fact. In a country where it was illegal to possess any firearms, guns or pistols, wasn't it a very daring act of conspiracy to manufacture bombs secretly? And Barin was doing so in the very heart of Calcutta city, although that bit of land was rather neglected and the building

sufficiently dilapidated to draw nobody's attention."

"But didn't you know about it?"

"Haven't I already told you that all my time was taken up by a great deal of political activity in those days? I had to run the *Bande Mataram* journal, teach in the National College, build up our National Party in order to fight the Moderates. All this took up most of my time so that I was only the titular head of the Revolutionary Group. It was Barin who was its *de facto* leader, consulting me whenever he felt the need. Otherwise he merely kept me informed about the group's activities."

"Wasn't it you who initiated him into the Revolutionary Movement?"

"Yes, I did, but that does not make me responsible for all his actions."

"How did he and the others learn to make bombs, such activities being illegal and banned?"

"Aren't looting and killing illegal and banned? And don't people learn how to practise them? Not only that, they also manage to get away with it. Bombs were made in secret, in fact the entire revolutionary movement was organised in secret. You can ask Nolini all about how they made the bombs. He knows all about it."

"Was he too part of the group?"

"Don't let his gentle appearance and quiet ways deceive you! He learnt everything directly from Barin himself and was one of those who carried a bomb for testing in Deoghar. He was also one of those who were caught red-handed at the Maniktolla Gardens. I have already explained how the boys learned much about the science of bomb-making from people like Sister Nivedita and Jagadish Chandra Bose. Of those young men, one of the brightest and most intelligent was Ullaskar Datta. He was the first to succeed in making a bomb for the Indian Swadeshi movement. When Barin was setting up the factory he had sent Nolini to me with an invitation to go and see it. But for some reason I couldn't go then. Later, just before our arrest he sent me two bombs so that I could examine them. I remember saying, "Take them away, immediately. The police will find out about them. Dismantle your factory and remove your things straight away. Searches and raids are imminent." I had sensed something of what was to come and warned the boys. But they did not heed my words and hence got caught. I was spared by Fate, and at the same time realised that the prophecy of Lele had come true."

"What is that?"

"You have heard about Lele, haven't you? Barin was very close to Lele. Actually, my brother was very warm and outgoing and could make friends with everybody easily. He had invited Lele to meet the young revolutionaries and, if he agreed, to teach them Yoga so that they could be trained to become great and fearless like Shivaji. Lele knew nothing of Barin's secret activities but the moment he realised what was going on he advised him to give them up. 'You

won't succeed,' he said 'You will get caught and the consequences will be disastrous.' And that is just what happened. Another of his prophecies also came true. He had said that no violence or bloodshed was necessary for India to win her independence, that she would become free by an act of Divine Grace. This was way back in 1907/8. It wasn't Lele alone who said this, many other Yogis too had foretold the same thing. But Barin did not believe Yogi Lele, for he found it completely incredible that the British should give us our freedom without being forced to do so through any violent or bloody revolution. It was, according to him, blatantly impossible, as impossible for instance as Kamsa suddenly becoming a lover of Krishna. Anyway, for the time being, it looked as if tyranny was on the ascendant and that Kamsa was victor. Barin and his friends became guests of the British Government, and so did I. This was the romantic story of the Maniktolla Gardens. The boys used to call the jail their 'father-in-law's house'! I'll tell you more about it later. Just now let me finish introducing you to the story of my overt participation in the political revolution and thus come to the close of this chapter of my life.

I think I have already told you that my introduction into revolutionary politics was through the writing of articles for the *Induprakash* against the British as well as the Moderates in the Congress. After that my political activities were carried out in secret, up to about 1905, while I seemed ostensibly busy with other things. It was during that period that I joined the Congress and got to know Tilak. I was, at the time, in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda, and therefore, I could not openly take part in any political activity, but I remember having long meetings and talks with Tilak all the same. All my contribution to politics during those years were secret, never openly made. My intention had always been to take away the power from the Moderates in the Congress Party. It was to this end that I helped establish the National Party with Tilak as its leader. I had clashed with the Moderates at several meetings already, for they were soft and weak. I thought theirs was a policy of prayer and petition, they seemed to beg for kindly concessions from the Government. These political clashes are too full of complex intrigues for your tender minds to understand, but I shall briefly explain to you our Movement and its purpose. Do not forget that our aim was complete independence. The moment Bipin Pal, editor of the *Bande Mataram*, invited me to become its assistant editor, albeit secretly, I accepted. From that day, I began writing articles advocating complete independence, Purna Swaraj. These articles quickly made a great impact on the minds of Indians all over the country. I came to Calcutta, giving up my job in Baroda. When the Bengal National College was established, I became the Principal there."

"You continued with your political activities while you were a professor?"

"Yes, though it was secretly, that is to say, anonymously done. Of course, every one knew who the author of the articles was. My name was on everybody's

lips as well as in the government files and in all the Anglo-Indian papers.”

“How did that happen?”

“According to them, nobody else could possibly have written the articles that were published in the *Bande Mataram*. When the government filed a case against the paper because of a particular piece of writing, my name came to light. And I was obliged to come forward to take my place as one of the leaders of the nation. It was the dashed government that spoilt the lovely game I had been playing in secret!

(*To be continued*)

NIRODBARAN

(*Translated by Jhumur from the Bengali*)

HINTS

SUDDEN recognition
Of the insignificance
Of wares in my heart's mart
Is a release, a wonder.

An announcement,
Subliminal,
That new intimacies await.

Just below the horizon
Is a never-seen dawn
With new senses,
Strange perceptions
In its aureate glow.

In front
Are half-open doors
Of a soul-garden.

DINKAR PALANDE

SOME EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF AN “EXTRAORDINARY GIRL”

A REPORT BASED ON ORAL COMMUNICATION

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1991)

Tagore's Dilemma

A FEW days ago, during one of my visits to Esha, she told me of an incident which merits a digression from our main story.

She said, “If I am in a bad mood it's because of something annoying that happened this morning. But you may find it interesting.

“A visitor came to see me. He had been sent by a dear friend in Calcutta to enquire about my present circumstances. He came at a very inconvenient hour when I was busy mopping the floor. I had to hide my annoyance. He wanted an interview and asked me if he could put any questions to me that he liked.

He said, ‘I have seen your Calcutta residence. It is a palatial house. What makes you settle here and live a lonely life in this dirty quarter of the town, in this—this small hole and mopping the floor? You must be suffocating. Are you secure?’

“‘No, I am not. There have been thefts and robberies recently in this building. But I am not quite alone. I have a friend. She looks after me and helps me in my need.’

“‘But if you fall ill, for instance?’

“‘Well, then I go to our Nursing Home where the Ashram Doctor takes care of us.’

“‘But why all this unnecessary trouble and hardship when you have your own son and his wife at Calcutta ready to take care of you?’

“‘Why should I be a burden to them? They have their own way of life and I have mine. They will certainly consider me a bore and a hanger-on after some time. Both of them have their own duties, office work, pleasures, etc. How can they tolerate me for long even though they are fond of me? Besides—’

“‘Yes?’

“‘You don't know why I have come to Pondicherry. I have come to do sadhana. Sri Aurobindo, my Guru, has brought me here. It is He who looks after me. In his security I am secure, not in anyone else's. Do you understand?’

“‘Yes, I do.’

“He kept quiet for a while, then he resumed: ‘May I ask you a very sensitive question? We have heard that a strained relation grew up between Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Is it true?’

“‘Not that I know of. How can it be? You know Tagore had a great respect

for Sri Aurobindo. Remember the exquisite poem he composed on him? Remember also his interview with Sri Aurobindo in later years and what he said? Don't you know all that?

" 'Yes, I do. But the disagreement occurred over a matter concerning a very sad and painful incident—'

" 'Let me hear it!'

" 'You know it was about Sahana Devi's sister who had come away like you, for sadhana, leaving her husband and family, and has never gone back.'

" 'Well?'

" 'When her husband, who was very fond of her, was on his death-bed, he wanted to see her for the last time. But it seems she was not given the permission to leave the Ashram and the poor man died with her name on his lips, so to speak. That shocked and aggrieved Tagore very much. He was baffled and bewildered. How could the path to God be so cruel? he wondered.'

" 'Yes, yes, I remember it all. You, however, 'don't seem to know the sequel. Let me tell you. I heard about it and, I think, it came out in some newspaper. It was my uncle who had it published. You see, one day my mother received a call from Tagore to see him. She often visited Shantiniketan. Tagore liked her and would often want her company. So when she went to see him he unburdened his perplexity to her and asked for an explanation. She replied, 'I can't give you the answer. But I can write to my brother at Pondicherry and ask him to get a reply from Sri Aurobindo.' Her brother did get a reply. Sri Aurobindo wrote—I give you the purport—'When people can leave their families and give their lives for a noble cause like, for example, the Swadeshi Movement—so many youths have done it—and their sacrifice is spoken of in golden terms, then here, when it is done for the sake of the Divine, why does one get a sullied name and have the path of God labelled as cruel? What better sacrifice can there be than for the Divine?' That was the answer. Tagore read it and said, it seems, 'I can't argue with him.' Moreover, you must not forget that Sahana's sister came away with the consent of her husband.

" 'As for the path being cruel, what about Buddha and Sri Chaitanya? You know their life-stories. Even if they seemed to be cruel to their families, did they not bring peace, love and compassion to millions?

" 'Now, since you bring in Tagore, let me narrate to you another episode. You know my uncle Dilip Roy used to have regular correspondence with him. They loved each other, and they quarrelled too. That's the nature of love! However, once Tagore wrote to him, 'I received your letter. I am glad to find that when in these days so many Avatars are springing up, you simply wrote 'my Guru' and did not claim him as an Avatar. Instead you have called him *Mahapurusha*. In that case, Sri Krishna, Rama, Christ, Sri Ramakrishna, etc., etc. are, we should say, all *Mahapurushas* in order not to offend the people.'

" 'You know, with all due respect to Tagore, he was not a Hindu but a

Brahmō Samajist, so he didn't believe in Avatarhood. I shall now ask you one question: why do all of you call him Gurudev? In what sense is he a Guru? What has he taught you? You are not even a poet or a writer!

“ ‘But he is a great man, a *Mahapurusha*. Don't you agree?’

“ ‘Certainly, I do. He is known and respected all over the world. He can be a *Mahapurusha* but that doesn't make him a Guru, does it? Gurudev has a deeper overtone; it has a spiritual sense. Hence if Tagore objects to Avatarhood, one can object to his being called Gurudev. Sri Aurobindo explains what is meant by Avatar. He doesn't claim it himself. He says he doesn't care a damn if he is an Avatar or not. But we Hindus find that Rama, Krishna and others including Sri Aurobindo do possess the qualities that can be ascribed to an Avatar.’

“The meeting ended and I felt relieved.”

We now resume Esha's story.

Attempt on my life

I was telling you about the very beautiful relative of mine who had been forced to marry a most ugly man for the sake of money and was never happy.

Before her marriage she was living with me and my mother. My mother had a servant whom I did not like at all. On any excuse he would pop into my room, and at any time, in spite of my severely scolding him about it and forbidding him to enter. My mother would be very much displeased at my behaviour. My relative also used to say that I should not use such strong language. I would plead with my mother to dismiss him, but she would sing the same refrain each time: the man works well; it is very difficult to get servants now-a-days, etc , etc. Eventually, she gave in and dismissed him. But it was not the last we heard from him.

After a few days something happened. My relative and I slept in the same room. At the foot of my bed was an almirah where our letters, ornaments etc. were stored and the key used to hang in the keyhole. The almirah always opened with a harsh sound. One night I woke up to a noise and whispered to my relative to wake up and told her that somebody was there in the room. Then again a harsh sound. “It is the sound of the opening of my almirah,” I said. When finally we found the courage to get up, we discovered that the almirah was open and one drawer was missing. We looked for it up and down and at last located it downstairs, the papers scattered on the floor, the jewellery gone, and an initial scrawled there. We understood at once it was the servant's mischief, for his name began with that initial.

A few days later another kind of mischief started. We began missing foodstuffs from the kitchen. I had a faithful servant of my own. He decided to keep watch at night with a thick stick in his hand. As soon as he saw the man

stretching his hand through the window, he struck it a heavy blow. The thief ran away through the garden. Following his tracks, we saw traces of blood vanishing into the darkness. Next day our driver did not turn up for work. Naturally we suspected him and wondered if he could be the thief. After some days he turned up with a bandaged hand. There was no doubt now. We informed the police. They thrashed him mercilessly and made him confess. He admitted that a man had put him up to the job and had promised him an attractive reward for a more difficult assignment later on. He did not, however, disclose the man's name. But we had no doubts who he was and suspected that the assignment might be to kill me. We conveyed our fears to the police. A guard was posted to keep watch. After quite some days, again I heard a sound during my sleep and woke up. I saw a shadowy figure reflected in the mirror with a dagger in his hand. I shouted at once and jumped to the other side of the bed. The policeman on guard rushed in, people came running, but the man decamped. We observed that he had come up climbing the drain pipe.

We were in a panic and decided that we must leave the place and move elsewhere.

There have been other attempts too. We shall speak of them later on.

(To be continued)

NIRODBARAN

HOW THEY CAME TO SRI AUROBINDO AND THE MOTHER

29 True Stories of Sadhaks and Devotees

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by Shyam Kumari

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ASWAPATHY AND THE MARUTS

SOME INSIGHTS ON THE FATHER OF SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1991)

THE Maruts are described in the Rigveda (VII.56.1) as the leaders who do not wait upon events but lead the way, open it up in their vigour for the benefit of the supplicants. In another verse (V.52.16) they are called the impellers of all that was of old and of all that is new, of all that rises from the soul and all that seeks expression. Sri Aurobindo sees the Maruts as powers behind all thought and speech as their impellers. They battle towards the Light, Truth and Bliss of the Supreme Consciousness.

Aswapathy is the forerunner, the 'thinker and toiler in the ideal's air'. He is the 'protagonist of the mysterious play' who brings down to earth's dumb need the 'radiant power' of Savitri and compels her 'mortal birth'.

The Maruts are borne on horses. Asva, horse, in the Vedas signifies power, life-force and indicates dynamic energy for action. 'Aswapathy' means the lord of Asva, or the master of the life-forces. The horses of the Maruts are said to be perfect and graceful, not wild and uncouth, indicating that they are well under control. They are described to be of two colours. One is red, signifying dynamic energy, intense activity. The other is tawny, which stands for auspiciousness, a presager of happiness. The Maruts come on these horses to the waters, the excellent streams of the illumined consciousness-force in order to rain them on the thirsty soul of the worshipper and thus fulfil a glorious task. The wheels of their chariot strike the earth, *i.e.*, the pressure of their movement furrows the hard soil of the dense physicality of the being of the Yajamana, the sacrificer. The physical body which is inert, immobile and resistant to change, is kneaded into a sufficiently malleable state so that it may acquire the necessary plasticity and shape to receive and hold the riches of the higher light and power. This is indispensable if the journey is to proceed smoothly without delay or breakdown. With their double pressure of force and light, the Maruts work on the body in the very act of their ceaseless movement and make its ploughed soil ready to receive the seeds as the gift of the higher gods.

The presence of Aswapathy is shown to bring this benefit to mankind. Aswapathy is the arch-mason of the soul and the 'builder of the Immortal's secret house.' He stands for the Maruts who work for the divine descent. He is the tiller who prepares matter and impels the divine waters to descend and enliven the seed of divinity which is latent. As long as Nature's Real-Idea remains unrealised, he can have no rest. Aswapathy's yoga is described as a repeated effort to soar to divine heights and win a 'firm spiritual poise', a 'settlement in the Immutable'. When the nether members draw back the spirit

from the heights 'to the blind driven inertia of our base' it is shown that even this fall is used by the Supreme for a good cause. Sri Aurobindo says that the subtle guest comes to the darker parts and curtained by the darkness, he works till they too feel the need and will to change, so that the body's cells also become capable of holding the Immortal's frame. The line of defence is slowly chipped off giving scope for the beginning of a 'happier cosmic working'. Even the earthly parts—the inert parts—could be raised towards higher things. Aswapathy requests the Divine Mother to awaken matter to the Godhead which sleeps frustrate 'with in its seed.'

All he had done was to prepare a field;
His small beginnings asked for a mighty end...¹

In the symbolism of the Vedic mystics Heaven and Earth stand for the higher consciousness of the Mind and the awakened consciousness in the physical. The Maruts, who are the gods of the purified thought-energies, work to bring about the dawn and settle the higher consciousness on the levels of the Mind on one hand and, on the other, extend and heighten the awakening of consciousness in the physical being. The advent of the Maruts is followed by their kinsmen, the waters that flow in profusion. The waters symbolise the currents of the conscious being Sri Aurobindo says that the mystics look to the Maruts to cause the waters to flow not only on the tracts of their existence which have been subjected to a continuous pressure of arduous discipline, but also to the other parts, the wastelands that have remained unresponsive, too dry and lifeless to participate in the general progress. The streams are said to run in all directions bathing the entire being of the Yajamana, rejuvenating and illuminating him.

His path is flooded with these streams of Waters and the lowing Cows, the infant rays of light which are beginning to show themselves on the horizons of the highest attained levels of the seeker, are urged by the Maruts with their impelling Words, to enter,—go in knee-deep and not stand out on the edge,—into the waters and drink and grow on their substance.²

King Aswapathy is 'the Lord of life', 'a god in the figure of the arisen beast'. He is the 'knower', familiar with the Divine Law which governs All. Like the Maruts, he is the *Satyaśrutah*, the one who hears the Truth, who is open to the divine audition, the inspirations of Truth. He is also the seer, who sees with the eye of knowledge through the barriers of Time and Space. The speech of the Maruts is said to be mighty in results and their utterances are said to grow ever

¹ *Savitri*, Bk 3, Canto 2, p 357

² *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda* by M P Pandit, p 83

and ever mightier for the benefit of the supplicant. Aswapathy is one such victor who requests the 'Mother of the Universe' to descend and shower her grace on the entire race and let the unresponsive tracts too reap the benefits:

"Mission to earth some living form of thee,
One moment fill with thy eternity,
Let thy infinity in one body live...."¹

Aswapathy succeeds in winning the 'wide consenting voice' for the transplantation of a 'branch of heaven' in the human soil, so that the whole of nature may be benefited.

But the waters or the currents of the conscious being are said to flow only to the bounteous man; *i.e.*, he who keeps nothing for himself but gives and gives largely what he owns to the Gods, to the Universal Powers (Rig Veda, V.53.2). The nature of Satyavan, the inner discipline which he undergoes and his attitude towards Life and Nature indicate that he is the bounteous man.

The Vedic hymns indicate the process in which the forces work. The subtle powers of Life, as they are set working in the Yajna, in the inner consciousness of the Yajamana, rise to the higher levels of thought, impart their nerve-force to its movements and initiate an upward thrust which brings down the floods of the Higher Consciousness, the Waters that are instinct with the light of the Divine Mind above, and pour into the being of the worshipper words of revelation, *ilābhih*. The revealed word, the Shruti, is vouchsafed not to anyone in the raw, but only to one who has by the progressive inner growth lifted up the dynamism of his life-being to the level of the mind, imparted its energy to the upward soaring thought-aspirations and thus equipped himself to receive the word.

On one side, as the aspiring individual, Aswapathy possesses the above-mentioned perfection. Sri Aurobindo's description of Aswapathy's experience is a proof of this. The downward flood of the Higher Consciousness is described in Aswapathy's realisation. When the 'greater self comes sea-like down to fill this image of transience', he knows that all will be captured by delight and will be transformed. Aswapathy wins the 'hidden word', 'the long-sought clue' and he requests the Divine Mother's descent to 'break the seals on the dim soul of man'. So, on the other side, Aswapathy is the subtle power of life who initiates the upward thrust and brings down Savitri, the Higher Consciousness and the 'word'. Undoubtedly Satyavan is the being perfected by his sincere surrender, who deserves the Divine Mind and wins Her.

The awakening of the Maruts brings a natural outflow of happiness. But the Maruts do not rest tranquil in the enjoyment of this Ananda. They are essentially powers of movement (*yayiyah*), powers that seek and embody, seek yet more and manifest. Sri Aurobindo says:

¹ *Savitri*, Bk 3, Canto 4, p 391

The Maruts are energies which make for knowledge. Theirs is not the settled truth, the diffused light, but the movement, the search, the lightning flash, and, when Truth is found, the many-sided play of its separate illuminations.¹

The Maruts win the treasures of knowledge and light which are massed on the heights of the Divine Mind and give them away. Aswapathy is the 'Traveller of the world-star' who ascends from one level of perfection and beatitude to another. He enacts this play of the winning and giving of the treasures of knowledge to humanity. He is the impeller whose speech activates and causes the downpour and spread of the waters which irrigate and fertilize the fields of the being of the worshipper.

(To be continued)

B. VARALAKSHMI

¹ Quoted on p 78 of *Aditi and Other Deities in the Veda* by M P Pandit

A SALUTE TO P. COUNOUMA

Managing Trustee of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Padmanabhan Counouma passed away on 10 February this year. He was born on 17 November 1908. The Mother appointed him on 21 September 1968 a member of the Board of Trustees, of which she was the President. On 13 March 1969 she empowered him to act as Attorney and Legal Adviser of the Board and to sign, on behalf of it, all correspondence as well as execute its general business.

A man of wide culture, partly trained in France, a prominent figure for a time in Pondicherry's administrative set-up, Counouma played his part excellently in all the spheres of his activity. He was no stickler after red tape and mostly let his sharp intelligence and humane sympathy cut through difficult situations but always took care to carry his fellow Trustees harmoniously and respectfully with him. Though no believer in conventions and ceremonies, he was deeply devoted to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. He offered all his means and properties to them and lived a simple life in service of them and their Ashram.

When the office of *Mother India* was moved from Bombay to Pondicherry he was named its Publisher. The editor has happy memories of a long association with him. He salutes him as a worthy worker in the cause of the New World of Spirituality which their Gurus have sought to build.

THE DRAMATIC ART OF SRI AUROBINDO IN *RODOGUNE*

ALDOUS Huxley in his famous essay, *Tragedy and the whole Truth* says that tragedy has a 'chemical purity' because of which it performs its function of catharsis very effectively. Tragedy has a tremendous 'power to act quickly and intensely on our feelings'. Huxley categorically asserts the incompatibility of tragedy and the whole truth. Tragedy cannot convey the whole truth. Huxley justifies his notion thus: "Brought into contact with tragedy, the elements of our being fall, for the moment at any rate, into an ordered and beautiful pattern, as the iron filings arrange themselves under the influence of the magnet."¹ Before the witness of a tragedy, our elements are in disarray, and as we come to the end of a tragic spectacle, the elements converge onto order and beauty. The spell that tragedy casts upon us is condensed and deep. "Tragedy is," in Huxley's beautiful definition of it, "an arbitrarily isolated eddy on the surface of a vast river which flows on majestically, irresistibly, around, beneath, and to either side of it."²

The reason why the opinion of Huxley is brought in here is that Sri Aurobindo's play, *Rodogune* presents a truly tragic spectacle capable of stirring our inmost depths with a very strong, isolated intensity. The emotional intensity is carried in us to an uninterrupted crescendo from the beginning to the end, unrelieved by any comic interlude. The tragedy is as much of *Rodogune* as of *Antiochus*. But all the forces are allowed to converge on the character of *Rodogune*. From the beginning, *Rodogune's* innate goodness, simplicity and purity are set off against the vile crookedness of *Cleone* who cannot tolerate the presence of *Rodogune* around the queen, *Cleopatra*. To *Cleone* *Rodogune* is none other than 'a statue of chalk/In a black towel dismally arranged'.³ But *Eunice* gives an apt rejoinder to *Cleone*, saying that the young king will prefer *Rodogune* to her. The centre of interest in the play is *Rodogune* against whom plots are contrived by *Phayllus* and his sister *Cleone* for fulfilling their ambitions. The opening scene of the play ends with this furtive understanding between the two to assist each other by means of courage, falsehood and brains.

Antiochus and *Timocles* arrive from Egypt. *Antiochus* reveals to *Philoctetes* his dream that he was sitting on Syria's puissant throne. He rejoices in the prospect of becoming the King of Syria, as he is the elder of the twins. "It is divinity on earth to be a king," he says. When *Philoctetes* suggests what would have happened if *Timocles* had proved to be 'the elder born', *Antiochus* poohpoohs the idea, eulogizing *Timocles'* happy-go-lucky, mercurial temperament. *Antiochus* says about *Timocles*:

"Sunshine and laughter and the arms of friends
Guard his fine monarchy of cheerful mind."⁴

Antiochus is lion-like, majestic and royal in his gait and demeanour. He is lifted to the heroic stature from the first appearance he makes in the play. He says to Philoctetes:

“It is better
To lift our hopes heaven-high and to extend them
As wide as earth. Heaven did not give me in vain
This royal nature and this kingly form,
These thoughts that wear a crown.”

So Antiochus bubbles with the buoyancy of spirit and is propelled by the irresistible impulse within himself. But this heroic grandeur is fraught inevitably with the likelihood of sparking off ‘fatal jealousy’ in others. As Philoctetes says, Antiochus’ ‘young heroic arms would gird the world’, if, of course, he was chosen King. But that was not to be. Despite his being the elder of the twins Antiochus is deprived of kingship by Cleopatra who fears that Antiochus will not give her due credit after becoming the King. Cleone works subtly and shrewdly upon her mortified deliberations. She reminds the Queen:

“This is no man to rest in peaceful ease
While other sceptres sway the neighbouring realms.
War and Ambition from his eyes look forth,
His hand was made to grasp a sword-hilt. Queen,
Prevent it; let our Timocles be king.”⁶

Cleopatra decides at the end of Act I:

“Gods who mock me,
I will not suffer to ail time your wrongs.
Hush, hush, Cleone! It shall not be so.”⁷

She is beginning to be paid back in her own coin. As she confesses about her late husband after whom the elder-born was named:

“Am I she who left
Laughing the death-bed of Antiochus?”⁸

So the die is cast. Timocles becomes the King. The irreversible doom is assured. For, effeminate in nature and volatile in temperament, he is egged on always by the rousing passion for sensuous enjoyment of ‘gracile Syrian women’ among whom Rodogune simply bewitches him. Timocles’ mind is subtly worked into by the crooked machination of Phayllus who has an ambition to rise near the throne. Timocles gradually becomes a tool in the wily manœuverings of Phayllus

It is Phayllus who thinks that if Timocles becomes the King, he himself 'may sit unobserved on Syria's throne' That is why he keeps aflame the passion of Timocles for Rodogune, and at the same time makes arrangements for the gradual cleavage between the two brothers. Of course, Timocles differentiates Rodogune from other women. She is not like a common flower to be plucked by the common hand. The fair inside of beauty marks off her character. Her eyes 'are a liquid purity' and

'she is heaven-pure
And must like heaven be by worship won.'

Phayllus reminds him that all the women are born of one mother called Nature, that Rodogune wears only the quick barbarian's robe of modesty and that when the robe is plucked the woman in her will fall. He compares Rodogune to a fish swimming in the river of love as men call it, but actually, as he says, it is lust or passion Phayllus sees Rodogune with eyes of lust, while Timocles with those of veneration for her purity. Most womanlike, Timocles desires to kneel, look up at her and touch the little hand that fluttered like a moonlit butterfly about his mother's hair. Phayllus promises to bring her near him, and Timocles is completely taken in by Phayllus.

While Cleone worries the conscience of the Queen to death, Phayllus enkindles the flame of passion in Timocles by subtle chastising. Cleopatra's choice of Timocles as the King is absolutely unjustified and fraught with terrible consequences. Mentho the nurse cannot mend her choice, but she is courageous enough to unbosom the truth that royal, young Antiochus was first on earth and, therefore, he should be the King The monstrosity of the lie on which the whole kingdom of Timocles is built from now on ultimately swallows all, both the good and the evil. The progression of events henceforth bears testimony to the open confrontation between the two brothers both of whom have lived in Egypt in their boyhood, coupled and inseparable from each other. Cleopatra's disastrous decision makes her son Antiochus rebellious and rouses his pugnacious instinct which can never rest in peace. He chastises his mother:

"When was it ever seen or heard till now
That victors sued for peace?
And this the reason,
A woman's reason, because many have bled
And more have wept. It is the tears, the blood
Prodigally spent that build a nation's greatness.
I here annul this peace, this woman's peace,
I will proclaim with noise of victories
Its revocation."¹⁰

This note of heroic stimulus knows no disordered rebellion. Antiochus proudly proclaims:

“Not by vulgar riot, not
By fratricidal murder will I climb
Into my throne, but up the heroic steps
Of ordered battle.”¹¹

So the inevitable has to ensue. Antiochus gathers all his men. Eunice and Rodogune are carried away by him with force. Timocles is rather grieved and enraged at the thought that Rodogune has eluded his grasp. He blames Phayllus. The melancholic strain in him at the loss of Rodogune distorts him completely till it zooms into insanity. For the moment, he is afraid that Antiochus ‘will come back and mount his father’s throne/And rule the nations.’ Timocles now has to accept the grim, ironic truth that Antiochus has always had the things that he prizes most in the world. In a despairing vein he tells Phayllus and Cleone to serve Antiochus in his tents for

“the future’s there,
Not on this brittle throne with which the gods
In idle sport have mocked me.”¹²

This weak, spineless king, ever a prey to his emotions, surrenders himself to the deceitful assurances of hope given to him by Phayllus. Phayllus gets the upper hand in dramatic action from now on. When Timocles most pitably says that he cannot live unless Rodogune is brought back, Phayllus assures him, and Timocles exclaims:

O subtle, quick
And provident Phayllus! Thou, thou, deviser,
Art the sole minister for me.”¹³

This is the greatest misfortune of a man who is driven on by his own un-governable impulse of lust sparked into flame by the evillest of creatures, Phayllus who is perhaps drawn by Sri Aurobindo in the shadow of Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. While Antiochus grows in stature, Timocles grovels as a creature beastly beyond measure. Even though Antiochus has stridden exultant like a god of death, he is doomed to face defeat because of Phayllus’ work of raising Greece and half of Asia against him. Antiochus decisively chooses not to delay strenuous fate tediously, but, as he says,

“Either to conquer with one lion leap
Or end in glorious battle.”¹⁴

Most heroically, he says to Philoctetes:

“With native swords I sought my native crown,
Which if I win not upon Syria’s hills
A hero’s death is mine Make battle ready.
Our bodies are the dice we throw again
On the gods’ table.”¹⁵

But he little knows that Timocles’ army will be strengthened by the Macedonians brought into action by Cleopatra herself. To increase his agony thousandfold, Thoas apprises him of other tidings. Thoas informs him that Phraates, father of Rodogune, is coming

“With myriad hosts behind him thunder-hooved,
Not for invasion armed as Syria’s foe,
But for the husband of his Rodogune”¹⁶

Antiochus stands alone, a terrible storm raging round his head now, but himself fearless, certain of meeting Fate fair and square. In a magnificent soliloquy he shines in his own light in full glow as a hero must: even when on the brink of a precipice, he is majestic in his own grandeur. He perceives godlike stirrings in him, which are not to be bounded by the petty world the sea can span. Standing on the edge of Life, he realizes that even if he were granted all his dreams of aggrandizement, there would ‘still be bounds, still continents /Unvanquished.’¹⁷ Just as Macbeth perceives at the end of his fretful career that life is nothing but a walking shadow, Antiochus feels almost in a similar vein that when all is said and done, the earth still remains ‘a hillock’ and the sea ‘an azure puddle’ All his swashbuckling adventures and wars, soaring ambitions, all that he is now and all that he might have been seem to be floating round him vaguely and withdrawing from him like grandiose phantoms in a mist. He now starts questioning who he is, whence he came, whither he will go, who gave him the gigantic appetites that make a banquet of the world and, above all, who set the narrow, scornful and exiguous bounds to his own achievements. He feels his doom sure and certain, and feels, Macbeth-like, that, after life’s fitful fever, only this achievement will be written against his name:

“He tried great things,
Accomplished small ones.”¹⁸

Antiochus cannot accept this grim truth that life is merely a composition of success and failure. A man of heroic stature, he naturally perceives that life has something more to offer to mankind. The spark of patriotic fervour is kindled in

him now by the sudden attack of the Parthian Phraates. As he says,

“He has smiled and waited
Till we were weak with mutual wounds and now
Stretches his foot towards Syria.”¹⁹

Antiochus will not be able to put up with this pungent attack from his brethren, only to be called the destroyer of Syria, ending the great Seleucus' work. It galls and stabs his very being. Even the gods will not be able to overtake him in this. He, therefore, decides to give up his body and sword to Timocles, to repel the Parthian and save Syria and then die. It may be noted here that it is not out of fear that he is going to join hands with Timocles, but it is his patriotic urge which impels him to save his country Syria from the attack of Parthia. He knows for certain that he will be defeated in fighting with the Macedonians, but even then he would die fearlessly as later events would exhibit. Antiochus always has yearned for glory and now he thirsts for mightier things than earth has. By virtue of his own sword he can create an empire, instead of inheriting one. He is not satisfied merely with occupying Parthia if at all he wins. He transcends here the limits of the actual, in fact, and enters the realm of the spaceless and the timeless. His heroic element then ponders over his dream of falling heroically and majestically upon the Macedonian spears. He says,

“Is it not more heroic
To battle with than to accept calamity?
Unless indeed all thinking-out is vain
And Fate our only mover.”²⁰

The soliloquy ends with Antiochus soliciting Zeus to reveal to him wherein his fate lies, in Antioch or upon the Grecian spears.

(To be continued)

PRANABANANDA BANDOPADHYAY

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| 3 Sri Aurobindo, <i>Rodogune</i> , I i (Pondicherry, 1973), p 7 | | |
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| 7 <i>Ibid</i> p 34 | 13 <i>Ibid</i> , p 82 | 19 <i>Ibid</i> |
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THE MAID OF FRANCE

FROM hallowed heights stooped a divine Grace,
To shower high wisdom on a country maid,
As quietly flowed the Meuse by Domrémy.
The Divine cares little for the too intelligent,
More precious to Her a heart simple and brave,
Her instrument She did not seek
In the domed splendours of the cathedrals of Europe,
Or in the tapestried halls of her opulent palaces,
Neither in centres of calculating courage,
Nor in the melée where reckless fighters
Flung life as a wager of no consequence.
The pomps of Paris were considered not,
A maid illiterate She chose.
Indrawn in her own mystic ambience
Like a sweet inaudible psalm on the winds
Who merged herself in the pure embrace of Nature,
Lack of learning had kept her innocent
Of devious duplicity's crooked ways.
An inexpressible élan that day upbuoyed the maid,
While she reclined under the Tree of Feys,
Her being effulgent in her soul's rays.
A sudden apocalypse left her
Marbled in the marvel and her eyes became
Two pools of the ineffable,
For, a guardian of celestial lustres, the Lord's messenger,
Stood revealed to her, Michael the Archangel.
Alight with adoration, lost in wonder,
A silent obeisance, she sank at his feet
That concentrated sum of Force, the Archangel spoke
Words that streaked through her like lightning's bolts:
"Arise, Joan! maid girdled with God's strength,
Wake thy nation from its agelong slumber, wake its courage.
Impatient are the Great Ones for the noble destiny
Of France to break her fetters, and for France to stand
Eloquent and await the pinnacles of her radiant future.
Hark! daughter of France, pay heed
To the magnificent peals of the Hour.
Save thy country, crown the Dauphin at Arnheim "

Two celestial torches of Infinity, those eyes
By their regard touched awake her inner divinity.

Rocked by the Heavens a tremendous upsurge she felt
For some moments that feigned eternity.
Suddenly she wandered on Infinity's verge
And entered the endless realms of true Power.

The gaze of the Archangel with love enringed
The prostrate innocence at his feet,
And his touch made her mortal heart
Immune to human cravings or evil's craft;
Henceforth fire will burn it not nor sword cleave in halves.
Invisible presences hovered about her and kept guard;
All nature felt a golden touch.

No more was she as of yore. Though not yet
The indomitable warrior, some faint whisperings
Uplifted her mind, rushed in her heart.
For something opaque in us clings to our ordinariness,
Mortality holds tight its crutch of weakness,
And falters at the golden Voice's insistence.
One day she bent her steps to the simple village shrine,
The hour being given to life's unending business;
Its sacred reverie was an eager welcome.
At first hesitating, her perplexity in a prayer gushed forth:
"Mother! am I bewitched? O Holy Virgin!
Do these mortal eyes pretend to the splendours of Angels?
Unworthy ears to messages of high purpose?
Who mocks me thus? I, to raise my nation!
I, an illiterate maid of Domrémy,
Is this a farce or a reality? My Lady!
Show me that which is my truth and Thy will."
Pucelle's candid eyes passed through the image
Into a luminous hush full of a Presence.
Human love's magnet had not triumphed over her heart,
To her of equal value were flowers, jewels or gauds.
A task well done and succour to the poor,
And sweet fulfilment found in prayer,
Were rewards and joys dear to her,
Moments passed and beauty's burning brazier,
A Face leaned from topless heights,
All nature was limned with a mystic light,
Echo of a million harps a voice replied:
"O victorious blade of my sword,
Judge not by the present's glimmer tomorrow's sun,
For a brief span, clothe this drab earth

In gold-red raiments of martyr's blood.
 An immortal flame in mortal's night,
 Maid immaculate! sure of my help, fight.
 Victory will be thy hand-maiden,
 Thy reward self-sacrifice."

Once sure of her mission, she of nineteen summers,
 Rushed forward, a river of love, a volcanic eruption
 Red and gold and hot on the heels of the enemy,
 An avalanche invincible, a mighty river's surge.
 Holding God's banner high, she marched
 Till victory became hers, and at Arnheim
 Was fulfilled the God-given task.

Alas! the lowly men can bear not greatness of others.
 Her male attire and masculine habits,
 Lack of womanly coquetry and cowardice,
 Became a serious crime in their stultified eyes.
 By her unselfishness she wounded their ego and pride;
 Her courage held high, crushed their shopkeeper's souls,
 And her bravery left them fuming and speechless;
 Her faith like a banner of light unfurled and billowing high
 Filled with unease their stifled puny hearts.
 Alas, Consciousness was killed and Grace spurned,
 When tied to the stake the Maid burned
 Holding the cross in her hand, on her lips the Name Divine,
 Though vanquished she triumphed over men and Destiny
 Sweet echoes of that golden name, that made history,
 Reverberate down the corridors of adoring centuries.

SHYAM KUMARI

Courtesy Sri Aurobindo's Action

MARCH 15, 1917 AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

AN HISTORICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRECTIVE

1

WHEN popular historians talk of the momentous event in Russia in 1917 which put an end to the Tsars who had ruled that country for centuries with an absolute monarchy under which feudalism had been in full sway, they put forward the Bolshevik Communist Party as the prime mover.

Their books spotlight November 17 and in view of the old Russian calendar dwell at length on the “October Revolution” under Lenin as the turning point in Russian history. Yet in fact it was on March 15 of the same year that Nicholas II proved to be the last Tsar. He was obliged to abdicate and a people’s government established—not at all by the Communist Party headed by Lenin. Lenin at that time was in exile in far-away Switzerland. Nor was Trotsky, whose name is most associated with Lenin’s, anywhere on the scene. Stalin too had nothing to do with the fall of the Tsar. Trotsky and he came into prominence after November 17 with the formation of a cabinet, called the Council of People’s Commissars, under Lenin’s chairmanship.

The Russian Revolution, marked by the fall of the Tsar, was really the final result of a movement in early March in which most of the workers of Petrograd were on strike for higher food rations and the soldiers were fraternising with them. The Tsar sought to put down the workers by force and dissolve the Duma, the Council of State. The Duma refused to obey, while the Petrograd workers took over the capital on March 12. Three days later the Tsar stepped down and the Duma appointed a provisional government led by Prince Lvov and including Milyukov and Kerensky.

The striking fact to be noted is not only the release of Russia from the Tsarist yoke and her emergence into a non-feudal modern world without the Bolshevik Communist Party having had any hand in these great changes. What we have specially to note is also the nature of the force that brought about the release and started a new era. This nature can be judged by the first acts of the provisional government: the general amnesty for political and military prisoners, freedom of speech and press, abolition of all social, religious and racial discriminations, the summoning of a constituent assembly, the restoration of local self-government under a new organised system. So the Russian Revolution which ended Tsardom was actually a liberal democratic Labour movement.

When we consider such enlightened circumstances, it is eminently in the fitness of things that what began thus should terminate in the *glasnost* (openness) and the *perestroika* (restructuring) which Gorbachev has brought about in our own day. The collapse of monolithic totalitarian Communism under the hammer

of his reformist genius—indubitably one of the epochal phases in European history—is the true culminating sense of the course of events leading to the fall of the Tsarist autocracy. To a surface look, Gorbachev may seem a freak in the tale of the Russian Revolution. And indeed in the wake of the long oppression of Stalinism which followed the death of Lenin, his democratic socialism is a luminous *volteface*, an apparent surprise against the background of the past seventy years or so. But to the deeper eye it is the fulfilment of the light which broke in Russia on March 15, 1917.

We may ask why it took so long for that light to be fulfilled. The answer is rather complicated. First of all, there was the question of the war with Germany into which Russia had plunged. What the rose-coloured spectacles of British journalism at the beginning of the First World War saw as “the Russian steam-roller” was in reality a poorly equipped unorganised half-starved mass of troops hardly able to stand against the German war machine. There was a series of conspicuous reverses. Accompanied by acute food shortage in the country and intense suffering of the civilian population, they brought on a climate of extreme discontent by the end of 1916. Naturally, Socialist revolutionary propaganda found ready response. The Tsar lost the support of the bulk of the Russian people and the uprising in March 1917 resulted in the triumph of liberalism. But misguidedly the new government turned a deaf ear to the clamour for peace with Germany. The tremendous failure of the all-out Brusilov offensive in July 1917 without the new government taking heed of it against the background of the nation-wide misery gave a handle to the Bolshevik Party to act as the nation’s spokesman.

Along with the continuation of the unpopular wasteful war, there was delay in taking measures of economic redress. Particularly the promised redistribution of land was delayed, pending the convocation of the constituent assembly.

Already before this unfavourable turn for the new government, Lenin had arrived in Russia. In view of the new rulers’ call to all exiles to return, the German government permitted Lenin to cross Germany in a sealed train and enter Russia in order to pull that country out of the war. He was a convinced Marxist and a veritable volcano of revolutionary force. He found the new government weak and vacillating. He tried to seize power in July by an armed uprising at Petrograd but failed. Its effect was a reshuffle in the government. Prince Lvov resigned and Kerensky headed a predominantly Socialist cabinet. However, Kerensky made no move either to outlaw the Bolsheviks or to conciliate Lenin. The war still went on and the Russian economy was in a state of collapse. Some unpleasant complications in his own party led Kerensky at last to seek rapprochement with the “soviet” the Bolsheviks had formed at Petrograd as at Moscow and elsewhere. They had no use for him. On November 7, Bolshevik troops occupied the main government buildings in Petrograd and arrested the cabinet. Kerensky escaped arrest and later fled to Paris.

Lenin's party captured centre after centre and, once in full possession, negotiated a treaty with Germany. In the meantime a decree abolishing private ownership of the land was passed and a "dictatorship of the proletariat"—actually complete authority of the Bolsheviks who were now called the Communist Party—was established and a policy of terror against all opposition was initiated. Perhaps this was necessary because of the precariousness of the new set-up against the numerous elements fighting not only against it but also among themselves and jeopardising the stability of the country. It may be remembered that a civil war broke out not long after between the "Reds" constituting Lenin's group and the "Whites" who have been described "as all shades of anti-Communist groups", several of whose leaders sought to establish a military dictatorship though few were outspoken Tsarists.

The civil war lasted till 1920 and was rendered most dangerous to the new regime because of intervention by Western-European nations as well as Japan. Lenin's Party won in the end, thanks to lack of co-operation among the "Whites" on the one hand and on the other to the remarkable organisational ability and military genius of Trotsky. There are reports of atrocities on both sides. Russia was left ruined and devastated. If she got on her feet again and became a successful Communist state, the credit goes to Lenin in particular who, no matter what the defects in his government, was on the whole a powerful progressive force. Only under Stalin did Communist Russia put the clock back.

That the Liberalism which had come into power with the abdication forced on the Tsar by the original revolution in Russia under Prince Lvov, Milyukov and Kerensky did not fail to leave a legacy to Lenin is shown by his treatment of the Russian Empire as soon as he was in the seat of authority. Having announced the right of national self-determination, he let this empire break up and allowed Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and other regions assert independence. No doubt, his handling of the Russian problem is marred by a host of mistakes and even "bulldozings" and by methods which could serve as starting-points of Stalinist tyranny, but he may be taken to have prevented Russia from sliding back to what it was before the Tsar's dethronement on March 15, 1917.

We may also mark the cleavage of Leninism from Stalinism by a reference to Lenin's will. Although Stalin suppressed it, it is now well known. Lenin had written: "Comrade Stalin, having become general secretary of the Party, has concentrated tremendous power in his hands, and I am not sure he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution.... Stalin is too rude.... I propose to the comrades to find a way of removing Stalin."

Gorbachev has found the way: Stalin is now removed from the life of today's Russia. There is in this Russia an antipathy to Lenin also. It is partly justified, but to mix up the two successors of Lvov, Milyukov and Kerensky is a hasty error. Without Lenin the dawn of a new age in Russia would have got clouded

over. However, the full flush of the light that arrived on the fateful March 15 is with us only with the rise of Gorbachev. What is not generally understood is the true nature of the world-movement of which he is the culmination. Stalin and his immediate heirs—save for a flash in the pan during the early days of Khrushchev—have blotted that nature from our view.

To have a true insight into the force in operation in Eastern Europe today we need to correct the perspective of the past that has been foisted on our minds by Stalinist Communism. Gorbachev is reviving and intensifying and perfecting the Liberalism—as much anti-Communist as anti-Tsarist—which was the real original Russian Revolution.

2

Only in one respect does March 15, 1917 fall short of being the seed of which Gorbachev is the full flowering. Politically there is no question of the sowing, but the Gorbachev psychology is not simply political. There is its attitude to religion. Lenin brought an element missing in the Lvov-Milyukov-Kerensky group. This element is the move away from traditional religion. Communism of the Marxist order, which prevailed after that group, was not only anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist: it was also anti-religious. Doubtless, it went to the other extreme and ended up in stark materialism, even if this materialism was “dialectical” and not “mechanical”. But inasmuch as it broke off from the dogmatic and sectarian religion known to Europe it was a force for the future in an indirect manner: it left the door open for a mentality which could be religious without the narrowness and exclusivism that distinguished historical Christianity. And Gorbachev, while restoring democracy, is free from this creed. The old churches are trying to reassert themselves and, pledged as he is to liberty, he will not suppress them as Lenin did. Lenin allowed them to exist as utterly private pursuits with no right to exert any public influence. Publicly a blatant materialism and atheism was promulgated. Gorbachev lets the old churches have their chance though the State as such is still distanced from them. Yet the long history of materialism which Russia under Marxist Communism has gone through will have obliquely prepared in the general mind the ground for something else than the old churches. Will this ground prove productive?

The religious impulse which, however submerged or overlaid, is natural to the Russian people and is said to have given even Marxist Communism the air as of a religion gone astray is likely to return in its true form but now coloured otherwise than with those churches.

Some signs are there of Indian thought stepping in among the élite. In the wake of Indology which is a wide-spread pursuit among them, the probable religious turn may be broadly towards Vedanta and ultimately Sri Aurobindo who combines the spiritual and the scientific outlooks and, while recognising the

spiritual aspiration to be the deepest heart of religion, holds no truck with dogmatism and ritualism. A Russian University has brought out a translation of *The Adventure of Consciousness* by Satprem, which is wholly oriented towards Sri Aurobindo and was first published in Pondicherry during the Mother's lifetime with her blessings. The original English version of it from the French is still sold by the Ashram at SABDA (Sri Aurobindo Books Distribution Agency).

The probable turn away from the narrow religion familiar to Europe is due to the Leninist materialism and atheism, not to the mind at work in the Revolution of March 15, 1917. However, even here the Gorbachev mentality can be said to have a subtle link. His tolerant attitude towards the old churches is not an inheritance from Leninism. It joins up with the mentality of Lvov-Milyukov-Kerensky. And the very tolerance which permits the possible revival of traditional Christianity is responsible too for the field being thrown open to Vedanta and the Aurobindonian message. So, while the antipathy to the old churches, in the midst of whatever tolerance of them is practised, derives from Leninist materialism and atheism, the room granted to religion in general and thereby to the wide-based futurist spirituality of Sri Aurobindo with its foundational affinities to Vedanta is traceable in essence to the broad-minded liberalism of the Russian Revolution of March 15, 1917.

K. D SETHNA

SRI AUROBINDO—THE SOUL OF INDIA

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1991)

DR. Krishna Dhan Ghose had a great ambition about the future of his sons, specially of Auro, and to give them a form of Anglomania. In order to fulfil his aim he made a second voyage to England with his three sons and his daughter, Sarojini. Binoybhusan, the eldest son, was then twelve years old; Manmohan, the second, was nine, Aurobindo was seven. The father wanted his sons to learn nothing at all of their native land and its ways. He put them with an English family: Rev. William Drewett, an English Clergyman, and Mrs. Drewett, at 84, Shakespeare Street, Manchester. Mr Drewett was a cousin of the magistrate Glazier of Rangpur whom Ghose knew very well. Dr. Ghose left strict instructions that “they should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence. These instructions were carried out to the letter and Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.”¹ He also ordered Pastor Drewett not to give his sons any religious teaching so that they could choose for themselves their religion if they wanted one when they came of age.

The Life in Manchester (1879-1884)

The two elder brothers of Sri Aurobindo were admitted into the Manchester Grammar School, but Sri Aurobindo was privately tutored by Rev. Drewett, who was an accomplished scholar. He was given a thorough grounding in Latin, in which Mr. Drewett himself was specially proficient. He taught him English History, etc. Mrs. Drewett coached him in Geography, Arithmetic and French. Sri Aurobindo got ample time to acquire a taste for English literature. He read at home on his own Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley and the Bible. He even wrote some verses for the Fox's Weekly. He had no taste for games. He played Cricket, but that only in Mr. Drewett's garden. The Drewett family found that Auro was a boy of exceptional qualities, sharp intelligence and deep concentration, a sweet temper and quiet and gentle ways. They also found him sometimes obstinate.

Mr. Drewett's mother was an orthodox Christian. She wished to convert these boys to Christianity in order to save their souls. Concealing her purpose she took Aurobindo to attend a meeting of Non-Comformist priests at Cumberland. Later, recalling from memory, Sri Aurobindo said: “...After the prayers were over, nearly all dispersed but devout people remained a little longer and it was at that time that conversions were made. I was feeling completely bored. The minister approached me and asked me some questions. I did not give any reply. Then they all shouted, ‘He is saved, he is saved!’ and began to pray for me

and offer thanks to God. I did not know what it was all about. Then the minister came to me and asked me to pray. I was not in the habit of praying. But somehow I did it in the manner in which children recite their prayers before going to sleep in order to keep up an appearance .. I was about ten at that time.”²

There is an attractive photograph of Sri Aurobindo at that period. The Mother’s observations on it are very revealing. She said. “...spontaneity and freshness of the nature and something candid with which he came into this world. His inner being was on the surface, he knew nothing of this world.”³

“At the age of eleven Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it ”⁴

St. Paul’s School, West Kensington, London: 1884-1889

After a few years of private coaching by the Drewetts, Sri Aurobindo joined St. Paul’s School. The Headmaster Dr. Walker was well-impressed with his proficiency in Latin. He took care to teach him Greek as he was weak in that subject. Under his proper care Sri Aurobindo was pushed up rapidly through to the higher classes in which his talents might get full scope for development. This saved some years for the student. Sri Aurobindo’s five years in St Paul’s were full of literary activity. Here he won the “Butterworth Second Prize in Literature and an Honourable Mention in the Bedford History Prize”.⁵ He used to take an active part in the Literary Society at St. Paul’s. “ but even at St Paul’s in the last three years he simply went through his school course and spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe. He spent some time also over learning Italian, some German and a little Spanish. He spent much time too in writing poetry. The school studies during this period engaged very little of his time; he was already at ease in them and did not think it necessary to labour over them any longer.”⁶ He participated in a debate once “on the inconsistency of Swift’s political opinions on 5 November 1889 and on Milton on 19 November of the same year.”⁷ He did extensive study in English poetry. One of his favourite poems was Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam*. He recalls: “The *Revolt of Islam* was a great favourite with me even when I was quite young and I used to read it again and again, of course without understanding everything. But evidently it appealed to some part of the being. There was no other effect of reading it except this that I had a thought that I would dedicate my life to a similar world-change and take part in it.”⁸

“Rev. W. H. Drewett was in pastoral charge in 1879 but in 1881 he resigned his living on account of differences with the deacons. He is mentioned in the Church register in 1882 as staying in Manchester but ‘without pastoral charge’, so

he was in Manchester up to 1882, but later on, before 1884, he seems to have emigrated to Australia leaving the three Ghose brothers in the charge of his mother.”⁹

“...The three brothers lived in London for some time with the mother of Mr. Drewett, but she left them after a quarrel between her and Manmohan about religion. The old Mrs. Drewett was fervently Evangelical and she said she would not live with an atheist as the house might fall down on her.”¹⁰ As an orthodox Christian the old lady selected some passage to be read out by the three brothers at their prayer time. They did not like her for this sort of imposition. One day Manmohan was in a mocking mood and said to her that old Moses got only his deserts when his people disobeyed him! So from that moment she did not like them and left them.

After his brother's quarrel with Mrs Drewett, Sri Aurobindo and his elder brother Benoybhusan occupied a room in “the South Kensington Liberal Club where Mr J. S Cotton, brother of Henry Cotton, for some time Lt. Governor of Bengal, was the secretary and Benoy assisted him in his work.”¹¹

Dr. Ghose was unable to remit money regularly to his sons. So the three brothers were compelled to live in a very embarrassed financial condition in London. Sri Aurobindo later wrote about this hardship: “During a whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny saveloy* formed the only food.”¹²

The three brothers then were in a very pitiable condition in London. During winter they had no means to have a fire in the room and Sri Aurobindo had no overcoat to protect himself from the cold. Once he was asked whether that hardship had an adverse effect on his growing faculties or if it acted as an incentive. He replied: “Not in the least. You are writing like Samuel Smiles. Poverty has never had any horror for me nor is it an incentive.”¹³ Is this not an indication of his inner strength? The three brothers never complained about the failure of their father to support them. But at the beginning of their life in England their father used to send £ 360 per year. Dr Ghose was extremely generous towards the poor of his country, so he used to spend a lot of money on them. Gradually he became careless about the maintenance of his children in England

(To be continued)

NILIMA DAS

* a kind of sausage

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Correction

I thank Mr Achyut Patel for bringing to my notice an oversight of mine which appeared in the January *Mother India*. It is said on page 51 that Krishna Dhan passed the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University in 1885 from the Konnagar High School. Actually the year was 1858

NILIMA DAS

“SATYAVAN MUST DIE”

A DISCOURSE APROPOS OF A PHRASE IN SRI AUROBINDO'S SAVITRI

(Continued from the issue of 21 February 1991)

10. The Summer Noon

TRADITION has it that the death of Satyavan took place in the Indian month roughly corresponding to June. During this time of the year summer in the northern part of the country is at its peak, pouring scorching heat, and the rains are awaited eagerly for the happy solace and boon of new life they bring. There is a tradition also which holds the death to have occurred on the day of “no-moon-night”, *amāvasyā*. Vyasa's narrative does provide certain supports for this surmise. It clearly tells us that Satyavan and Savitri return to the hermitage only after it had grown quite dark in the night. The sequence, in brief, is something as follows. After the return of Satyavan's soul, he regains his consciousness and gets up like a person from a deep sound sleep. But he has still some vague dream-like memory of having travelled through strange weird places and of being taken away by one who was possessed of an exceptionally bright splendour. He enquires of Savitri whether she has any knowledge about this luminous being whom he had accompanied. She parries the question and tells him instead that they must return to the hermitage soon; she points out that the night is advancing fast and everything around them is getting engulfed in the growing darkness. She also speaks of the fearful howling of the jackals and of the movement of the stealthy night-prowlers in the wild forest. Later, when they finally decide to return, Savitri makes a suggestion that she could fetch a little fire from a near-by dry burning tree and light up the way with the help of twigs. Satyavan ridicules the idea and tells her, with pride, that he can easily recognise the correct path just by looking at the stars through the tree-branches and as such she need not harbour unnecessary apprehensions for getting lost in the jungle. At the hermitage also they are questioned, on their return, as to why they are late when it has grown so dark. That it must have been the night of *amāvasyā* has a great poetic justice indeed in which we at once see the possibility of a new life, happy, full of bright hopes, emerging out of the womb of utter darkness. Thus *amāvasyā* of the summer month, perhaps towards the end of June, could be taken as the day fixed for Satyavan's death. This must have been the day also on which Narad makes his prophecy a year earlier that only twelve months are given to the young couple to be together and that

This day returning Satyavan must die.¹

In a more symbolic manner it can as well be seen that the divine moon Soma, the nectar of immortality and heavenly delight, is totally out of sight in this death of Love on the earth. There is a significant interlinking between the occult and the physical and the poetry bears them both with a revealing and gracious ease.

The epic view of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* too puts the fateful day in the same period of the year, “Summer with his pomp of violent noons”. The several descriptions in the poem tie up very neatly with this central idea suggesting as if the summer-month is going to play some important role in the unfoldment of the events. Firstly, the royal convoy leads Savitri, after the marriage, from Madra to her new-found destined place, the path running through

...large lands
That lolled at ease beneath the summer heavens,
Region on region spacious in the sun,
Cities like chrysolites in the wide blaze. ²

One year after this summer's haste shall arrive the hour announced by Narād in the palace. For Savitri the sylvan solitude of the forest hermitage is presently a gorgeous dream, an “altar of the summer's splendour and fire”. In it burn “two bodies in one flame”; the young couple is locked intimately in conjugal relationship and the impending doom seems not to touch them. However, the bright summer is about to end, yielding place to the dark clouds of the gloomy days ahead:

At first to her beneath the sapphire heavens
The sylvan solitude was a gorgeous dream,
An altar of the summer's splendour and fire,
A sky-topped flower-hung palace of the gods
And all its scenes a smile on rapture's lips
And all its voices bards of happiness....
A fusing of the joys of earth and heaven,
A tremulous blaze of nuptial rapture passed,
A rushing of two spirits to be one,
A burning of two bodies in one flame..
But soon now failed the summer's ardent breath
And throngs of blue-black clouds crept through the sky...³

The year for them to be together has begun with the fiery passion of the summer. It shall be on the return of this season that Satyavan will die

Here let us also recollect that it was the summer that had witnessed erstwhile the god-touched meeting of Satyavan and Savitri and their marriage in a “happy solitude”. Savitri was going from place to place, travelling through

distant countries and unknown regions, without any clue as to where she was going to find her life's partner. But as though

Led by a distant call her vague swift flight
Threaded the summer morns and sunlit lands.⁴

The summer seemed to take her to the sunshine's certitude in the approaching success fulfilling her mission.

It was during this period when spring and summer had interblended, like sweetness and joy, that Satyavan and Savitri discovered each other. No doubt, summer was the chosen season for this epic event: In the amicable debate between the two seasons

Inarmed, disputing with laughter who should rule⁵

the verdict definitely went in favour of the royalty of bright purple blaze, "Summer with his pomp of violent noons". Again, appropriately enough, Narad's visit to Aswapathy's palace in Madra also took place when the "golden summer-earth" had attracted him from Paradise

Summer month June or Jeshtha Amavasya is thus the day fixed in Destiny's calendar for the death of Satyavan. What about the time? Let us see.

The poet introduces his epic to us by bringing the central event of the multi-dimensional episode right at the beginning and by describing the psychological state of Savitri with the fast-nearing fated day of Satyavan's death. She alone there knew what was going to happen on this calamitous *amāvasyā*-day; nor did she want to impart or share that foreknowledge, loaded with all its "peril and pain", with others, even with the one whom she loved most. Alone, and unhelped, "she must foresee and dread and dare". She had accepted the travails of life and put on the "obscure terrestrial robe" and made her pangs "a mystic poignant sword" to cleave the way of immortality. Everything was gathering, as though in a routine natural course, towards this focal point; but now

The long-foreknown and fatal morn was here
Bringing a noon that seemed like every noon.⁶

Things that were promised have to be fulfilled at that noon which but looked like all other noons. The poet knows that the promised fulfilment will come with the death of Satyavan and the time fixed for it is the bright mid-day hour.

There are three or four pertinent references made by the poet to this hour, clear pointers suggesting the death on the fated day to have taken place at noon. If Narad's pronouncement "This day returning Satyavan must die" is a turning point in the life of Savitri, then surely that hour is equally charged with its power.

It was at this moment that he had “set free the spring of cosmic Fate”, disclosed “destiny in that hour”. From this moment twelve months hence the edict is to come true. Incidentally, we can also infer that Narad’s visit itself to the palace happens to have been on the Jeshtha Amavasya day, a visit lasting, say, for about three hours of that morning. Narad makes the prophecy and tells of the possible happy ending of Savitri’s incarnate-mission; immediately then he takes his leave of Aswapathy for his home in Paradise, with the sun at its zenith in the sky:

Away from the strife and suffering on our globe,
He turned towards his far-off blissful home.
A brilliant arrow pointing straight to heaven,
The luminous body of the eternal seer
Assailed the purple glory of the noon...⁷

He came, sang the name of Vishnu for a happy hour, delivered the Word of Fate, explained what the gods strive for men on earth and, steeling the will of Savitri, left the earthly scene for the hour to work out the promised destiny. That hour is the hour of his departure, noon in its purple glory.

The moment of Satyavan and Savitri’s marriage, the “momentous hour”, too was when

On the high glowing cupola of the day⁸

Fate tied the knot joining them together in an inseparable union. Of course, this union could take place only after vanquishing Death. When Satyavan is about to breathe his last, Savitri grows aware of a presence “conscious, vast and dire”, “a silent shade immense”; she sees it

Chilling the noon with darkness for its back.⁹

The tropical noon of the summer month lies Antarctically frozen at that passing away. Then, again, Satyavan, when he regains his consciousness after Savitri has brought his soul back, has a faint remote memory of what had happened at noon; he tells the elders, after their return to the hermitage in the dark night, about his strange journey beyond this green earth:

Behold, at noon leaving this house of clay
I wandered in far-off eternities...¹⁰

Thus Death, the huge foreboding “mind of Night”, stood, in the terrestrial sense, across the path of the divine Event at noon in the summer month Jeshtha, the day being Amavasya, sometime in the early Vedic period.

In Vyasa's narrative also the hour of death is linked up with Narad's words. Thus, when Satyavan is about to die, Savitri, using his prognostication, reckons the day, the time, even the hour and the moment, and gets ready for the eventuality:

ततः सा नारदवचो विमृशन्ती तपस्विनी ।
तं मुहूर्तं क्षणं वेलां दिवसं च युयोज ह ॥

The event takes place at mid-day.

(To be continued)

R. Y. DESHPANDE

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NEW AGE NEWS

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Wind Power

WHEN Don Quixote, the famous literary figure of the Spanish writer Cervantes, was making his furious attacks against wind mills, he could not have guessed what marvellous constructions they were, from the ecological point of view. But today they are no more than a tourist attraction in Holland and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the idea of gaining energy from the wind is alive, especially now that it becomes more and more urgent to discover alternative sources. Wind power stations have been constructed in several countries, particularly in the coastal areas of Denmark where they work with great efficiency.

A very special effort was made by Gerd Seel, a 35-year old postal employee in South Germany. Investing 190,000 DM and 1500 hours of work, he has constructed on his own, helped by a few friends, a complete wind power station in a village near the city of Karlsruhe. Fixed on a mast of 25 m length is a three-winged rotor with a diameter of 20 m. A slow wind speed of 4 m per second is sufficient to get it moving and a sophisticated computer programme makes sure that the rotor always moves at the same speed (43 turns per minute) even in a storm. If the gusts become too strong, the rotor is automatically stopped. A stable construction makes sure that there is no danger of collapse in extreme weather conditions.

The power station generates 160,000 kw/h per year, which is sufficient to supply 55 houses with electric current all the time. Seel is allowed to feed the power into the public network and receives adequate fees for it so that the project is likely to be economical in course of time. Two years of research on the hill convinced him that the average wind speed is quite sufficient to keep the rotor moving most of the time. Since his installation is much less expensive than that of large industrial firms, he has already received ten orders from customers, half of them from abroad. Seel believes that his invention will have a great future and he is probably right in this assumption. Prominent politicians and industrial leaders will attend the inauguration of the installation. Meanwhile, visitors from all over the region flock to the hill to admire his unusual creation which is now the largest wind power station in South Germany

Source: *Badische Neuste Nachrichten* (16-10-90)

THE PRIZE POEM

A SHORT STORY

(From The Blood and Other Stories by P. Raja, to be shortly published by B. R. Publishing Corporation, 29/9, Nangia Park, Shakti Nagar, Delhi-110 007)

KING Moodapoda always chose pleasant evenings to discuss matters pertaining to his kingdom and people with his Minister. They took an evening walk in the royal orchard on a lovely summer evening.

“What’s all the news today?” began the king.

“My Lord, of late I have learnt from the spies that the poets in our land wish you to organize, now and then, a Poets’ Meet and distribute prizes to the participants as is done in the neighbouring lands,” answered the Minister. “This, to quote a spy, not only provides entertainment to the public but also gives the poets an opportunity to come out with their hidden talents.”

The king blinked and, after a while, shot another question: “What do you mean by ‘Poets’ Meet’? And what does ‘hidden talents’ mean?”

The Minister raised his eyebrows and replied: “My Lord, that is what I, too, cannot understand. But I could not have asked the spies, could I?”

Both of them racked their brains, then the King came out with a suggestion. “It is not worthwhile to torture our brains over a trivial matter. Instead you can go to a neighbouring land and make a study of the ‘Poets’ Meet’ and ‘hidden talents’.” The Minister commended the King’s suggestion and agreed to go as a representative of his majesty.

A week elapsed. The Minister returned from his study-tour and reported to the King: “My Lord, I had the opportunity to attend a Poets’ Meet. It was a grand performance. Are we in any way inferior to our neighbour? We should also arrange such functions and distribute prizes. It is very simple...”

“Tell me!” said the King eagerly.

“Poets,” continued the Minister, “both domestic and foreign were invited to participate in the poetry-reading session. The function began in the evening. The King delivered his inaugural address, which I have faithfully jotted down in my pocket notebook for you, so that you may without any difficulty reproduce it. Thereafter the poets, one by one, read their poems before the audience consisting of men and women. But I found no children there. Now, my Lord, comes a point to take note of. The moment a poet finished reading his poem, the audience clapped their hands while the dogs here and there barked. The clapping and barking, it seems, are the essence of the gathering. When all the poets had finished, the Minister read out a list of names written on a sheet of paper and proclaimed that they had won. Then the King, all the while smiling, gave each

winner a bag containing pieces of gold. But the size of the bags varied. Then the audience dispersed. And that is what a Poets' Meet is all about."

"Interesting and simple! Good! We, too, shall arrange a Poets' Meet," exclaimed the King. He asked after a pause: "And did you find out the meaning of 'hidden talents'?"

"Ah! That still remains a mystery, my Lord. I tried through all possible sources to understand that term, but in vain. On the way home, a new idea struck me. Allow me to give vent to it, though it may sound barbarous. But I find no other way."

"Continue," permitted the King.

"The only way to find out the hidden talent in a poet is to cut open his body and thoroughly search for it," suggested the Minister.

King Moodapoda wrinkled his brow and thoughtfully said, "It should be easy to cut open the body with a sharp knife. But we should also think about the aftermath. Suppose the poet dies in the process. The people will brand us as butchers. Further, if our search for the 'hidden talent' in the body ends in a fiasco, what a shame it would be! Let's not bother ourselves about that devilish thing. Let's leave it to the poets themselves and wash our hands of it. But by all means we should have a Poets' Meet from this month onwards. Announce it before the public."

The next day the town-crier beat his tom-tom and announced in the market place: "The King has great pleasure in announcing that a Poets' Meet will be organized on the fifth of every month at the royal auditorium. Whoever can write can participate and read the best of his poems. Grand prizes await the poets. All are welcome. Children will not be admitted, but dogs are most welcome."

King Moodapoda sent his messengers to give the news of the Poets' Meet to neighbouring and far-off lands.

On the appointed evening the native poets as well as poets from various neighbouring kingdoms gathered. A vast crowd consisting of men and women, some with their pet dogs, constituted the audience. The King, as advised by the Minister, welcomed the gathering with the borrowed speech and then requested the poets to read out their poems.

The first poet rose up and read out a very long poem. King Moodapoda was unable to make head or tail of it. But when the audience clapped their hands, he, too, followed suit. When they kept quiet, he remained silent. But all the time he managed to smile in order to give the impression that he was enjoying the recitation. When a poet finished reading his work, there was loud applause. Infuriated or scared, the dogs here and there barked.

The King was very pleased with himself, for according to his Minister the clapping and barking formed the essence of the affair. He looked at his Minister and smiled. The latter reciprocated the smile and congratulated himself by twirling his moustache.

One by one the poets went on reading their works. Moodapoda understood nothing. Neither did the Minister. They became restless and moody. But the King's spirits rose when he saw the last poet rise up to read his poem. He heaved a sigh of relief. But within seconds his spirits fell from dizzy heights to gloomy depths. "How to judge the winners and distribute the prizes?" was the puzzling question of the hour. Perturbed, the King gestured to his Minister to come nearer and whispered into his ear: "You didn't tell me the method of selecting the poets for the prizes. Have you already selected the winners?"

The Minister felt like the thief in the folktale who was stung by a scorpion at the moment of his departure with the booty. He scratched his head and hesitatingly replied: "That was the only thing that I forgot to study in my study-tour, your Majesty! But that matters very little. We are always at liberty to make our own selection as we wish. What do you say, my Lord?"

"You're right!" agreed the King. "I am at liberty to do anything I like. Who is there to dispute my rights? In the eyes of the King, all people are equal. Poets, it goes without saying, are also people. So to go by logic all poets are equal. Hence there should be no discrimination. And so no poet should go unrewarded."

"You mean equal reward, my Lord?" inquired the Minister.

"No, it's there we should use our common sense. When all the poets have recited their works, let us weigh their manuscripts one after another in a balance. And let us give gold to the poets equal to the weight of their scripts. What do you say now?" smiled the King appreciative of his own idea.

"What an excellent idea, my Lord! All the contestants will be very happy and you can judge their work by weighing them in an impartial balance. How original you are, my Lord!" applauded the Minister.

Meanwhile the last poet had finished reading his poem. King Moodapoda and his Minister came to know of it by the clapping and barking that followed.

The Minister then asked all the poets to fall into line. A balance was brought in and the first poet was requested to place his script on one pan. The King poured an equal weight of gold on the other pan and the poet moved away hugging his reward. The process continued.

The poets who wrote nothing but trash over many pages got several gold pieces, while a few genuine poets who expressed themselves in 10 to 12 lines bagged nothing but a sprinkle of gold dust.

The King and his Minister went away jubilantly. Not only had the function been a grand success, but also they were free from the tedium of listening to the poets for a full month to come.

Poets worthy of the title cursed the sovereign in their hearts and wept over their fate. Poetasters who could without effort turn out pages of trash praised him for inventing an impartial balance in judging poetry. But no one had the courage to open his mouth before the King, leave alone criticizing his actions.

“My good verse goes unrewarded whereas poetasters’ bags are bursting with gold. This fellow deserves to be taught a good lesson at any cost,” muttered a genuine poet who was among the recipients of gold dust.

The fifth day of the next month came and the royal auditorium was full. The gathered poets had under their arms big bundles of paper. Vagabonds who had never read a poem in their lives made use of the opportunity and carried on their heads reams of paper with some undecipherable lines of ‘poetry’. To add weight to the bundle they had cunningly inserted heavy metal pieces in between sheets of paper.

The King and his Minister reluctantly came to the auditorium. They were astonished to see the large number of poets with the burden of paper bundles balanced on their heads and shoulders. In fact, the poets outnumbered the audience. “My God! How to listen to all these poets?” Moodapoda ruminated. He consulted his Minister who replied, “My Lord, you should feel proud of this gathering of poets. Historians will talk of your reign as the golden age of poetry.”

“But each one will take more than a day to read his poem,” said the King. “If I sit here I’ll be driven to the edge of madness. Suggest some alternative.” The Minister thought for a while, then whispered to the King.

The King nodded in approval. And in his welcome address he added: “To discover what honey tastes like, just one drop of it is enough. It is needless to drink a jarfull of it and then suffer later. So too with your poems. Read only the first page of your works, and that too quickly and without pause, so that all the poets here may get their turn. And you need not worry over the recognition of your verse. We have here an impartial balance, which is capable of judging your entire work within seconds. Now you can proceed. Justice will be done to every poet ”

The poets obeyed, each one not taking more than a minute. The recitals went on so quickly that the King and his Minister heard nothing but the sound of clapping and barking throughout the four-hour session.

When the recital was over, the poets stood in a long queue to receive their prizes. The first in the queue placed his voluminous work on a pan of the balance. The King was about to pour pieces of gold on the other pan but was stopped by a cry: “Stop! O sovereign Lord, famed for your munificence, I have the biggest poem with me. Reward me first, lest I should lose the proper reward due to me.”

The King and the others looked around. There stood a poet at the threshold of the auditorium. He was the one who on the previous occasion had got nothing more than a sprinkle of gold dust and had gone away with the intention of teaching the King a lesson. Having attracted the King’s attention, he said with a smile: “Look! The biggest poem in the whole world. Send ten sturdy men to bring in my poem and estimate its merit.”

King Moodapoda walked to the entrance. There stood a bullock cart and on it lay a heavy stone slab, with four lines of verse chiselled on it.

“This will be much too heavy!” exclaimed the King.

“But this is also a poem,” responded the poet.

The King pondered deeply. He said to himself: “Promises by the King should be kept at all cost. I should keep my word or else historians will speak of me as a bad King. And I will fade into oblivion without even a monument built for me unless I myself finance it.”

The King then commanded that a big balance be brought. The stone slab was placed on one pan and the gold pieces were heaped on the other. But to no avail. Even after the royal treasury was emptied the pan that held the stone stirred but a little.

The King and his Minister were in a quandary. The poets and the audience burst into laughter. The King bent his head in shame. His downcast eyes fell on the four lines chiselled on the stone slab. They read:

“Before you weigh a poem by the pound
Ask if you can ever find
Treasures in all your lands around
Equal to those of the kingdom of mind.”

A flush spread across the King’s face. At last he understood what was meant by ‘hidden talent’.

BOOKS IN THE BALANCE

Sri Aurobindo and the Two Cultures: The Snow-Leavis Controversy: A Reassessment by L. R. Lakshminarayanan; Emerald Publishers, 135, Anna Salai, Madras-600 002; First published 1986; pp. xxviii + 263. Rs. 95/-.

EVER SINCE science began to dominate human life, the dichotomy between scientific and literary cultures has been a curious topic for frequent debates all over the world. Even today the controversy retains its attraction and evades a solution. But this controversy touched a new high when the two great literary giants C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis clashed through their contrary approaches to the controversy. Snow's Rede lecture published in 1960 as *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* recognizes the value of pluralism and tends to moderate the old dispute between the two cultures. Leavis's Richmond Lecture on "Two Cultures?—The Significance of Lord Snow" deviates from this spirit and advances the concept of monism. Only in this difference of opinion between the two literary personalities lies the temper of the book under review. Its author takes up for discussion various aspects of the well-known controversy and offers his own views on this aided by the views of the futuristic Yogi Sri Aurobindo.

Mentalists or rationalists hold the view that mind is the authentic source of knowledge whereas the transcendentalists feel that intuition is a powerful source of knowledge. Mind fails to look at things in their wholeness and creates several theories opposing one another. Sri Aurobindo aptly calls mind a realm of discord. To seek concord is to go beyond. Reality reveals itself in many ways to many people. If one approaches reality as a metaphysician or as a biologist, only that portion of reality relevant to the field concerned will be revealed to one. Such a rigid and dogmatic mind is an obstacle to a full understanding of life. *Either-Or* and *Both-And* are the two prominent attitudes of the human mind. If reality is to it monistic rather than dualistic or else *vice-versa*, the representation is an instance of *Either-Or*. If reality is to it monistic as well as dualistic, the double relation is an example of *Both-And*. Sri Aurobindo synthesizes these two: reality is one but dual, dual but one. It is this synthesis that the author favours in the course of his detailed discussion of the controversy. He states, therefore, that no one particular approach should be allowed to dominate in our attempt to view reality in totality. Leavis who has a specialist outlook on life in selecting Literature as the only remedy i.e., literary culture, belongs to the heritage of *Either-Or*. But Snow attempts to reconcile the opposition between the two cultures and posit a meeting ground.

Leavis brings in D. H. Lawrence to disprove Snow's theme of the unity of the two cultures. Snow has the spirit of a reconciler and Lawrence is a specialist with a particular choice of life. The author admits that since the western standards are incomplete, the Eastern standards are applied in this book to

moderate the controversy between Snow and Leavis. Indian tradition develops a unified view of life and any specialist view is hostile to the unity of life. The standards of Vedanta and Buddhism, much elaborated by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine*, work in full force in this book.

Sri Aurobindo states that matter is concealed spirit, i.e., in a form of grossness and density. Similarly Fr. Bede Griffiths and Dr. Fritjof Capra hold that matter and mind are interrelated and they form a psychosomatic unity. As a result, the traditional three-dimensional picture of space, time, matter gives way to a four-dimensional picture of space, time, matter, consciousness. These three thinkers contradict the spirit of Leavis which is characterized by exclusiveness and narrowness. The author points out that Leavis lacks philosophical perspective and his anti-philosophical attitude finds its echo in Lawrence. Hence the affinity between the two.

Snow says that the West is split into two polar groups, one owing allegiance to literary culture and the other to scientific culture. While men of literature ignore 'life in matter', men of science ignore 'life in spirit'. The idea of Snow is to promote understanding between the two groups and pool all their insights in a common place for the sake of humanity. This is his 'Social Hope' based on 'Compassion'; Lakshminarayanan sides with Snow: "Unless one achieves a certain level of material affluence, pursuit of spiritual well-being is not possible and therefore the work of the scientists comes first in the order of priority."

Leavis is on the side of literary culture and suffers from the predicament of 'either-or'. Leavis criticizes Snow's idea of 'Social Hope' and 'Social Condition'. The author says that Leavis gets on the wrong end of Snow's argument. He further says that Snow's idea of 'Social Hope' is a deep Vedic principle and aims at lifting people to a certain good standard of living; one cannot build a house from superstructure to foundation; Snow's concerns touch the base while Leavis's preoccupations touch the superstructure; both need to be integrated.

Sri Aurobindo grants that once we open the higher zones in the mental region new possibilities are in store for us and new ways of reconciling and unifying await our discovery. Lakshminarayanan is of the view that the real significance of the controversy can be judged only by taking it on to a higher dimension and unless the 'two cultures' of Snow and Leavis are related to 'The Two Negations' of Sri Aurobindo, there is no way to a final solution.

Aldous Huxley dubbed both Snow and Leavis single-track specialists representing partial views of the ultimate truth; but the author of this book refuses to agree with Huxley. He argues that Huxley suffers from lack of a unified scheme of life and that nowhere did Huxley state like Sri Aurobindo that the physical is the actual basis for anyone to start his work. He concludes in favour of Snow: "The integral perception of Sri Aurobindo which Snow possessed in his own way helped him to formulate a view of co-existence based on this symbiosis of the two cultures." However, he hastens to add that there is no motive to equate Snow with Sri Aurobindo but only to show that they were

one in their spirit and in their approach to the problem. Therefore it is a matter of sheer coincidence that Snow's Rede Lecture on "The Two Cultures" was reflecting this spirit of Sri Aurobindo's integral consciousness in pleading for a reconciliation of the two cultures and in laying stress on the material aspect of life no less than on the spiritual. The author feels that Huxley is more comprehensive than Leavis but Huxley's pursuit was not crowned by an integral view and he must be supplemented by the views of Sri Aurobindo.

Lakshminarayanan states that today there is a deep understanding between science and spirituality. Capra's *The Tao of Physics* and Sri Aurobindo's essay on 'Reason, Science, Yoga' are examples of this synthesis and mutual understanding. In the light of universalists like Sri Aurobindo, Fr. Bede Griffiths and Capra, Lawrence, Arnold, Eliot and Leavis are incomplete in their outlook. Negation and Affirmation are, according to Sri Aurobindo, two modes of one being. The unity between the two is to be perceived in the spiritual consciousness aided by a discriminating metaphysical inquiry. Matter and spirit; abstraction and concreteness; immanence and transcendence; life-affirmation and life-negation present themselves as pairs of opposites. Their opposition is reconciled by Sri Aurobindo by his doctrine of the interpenetration of all planes of reality. Thus all planes of reality are connected.

The phrase 'hubristic humanism' is an important term of evaluation used by Leavis in judging the merit of "the two cultures" and deciding their importance. Hubristic humanism is a view which implies an attitude of human self-sufficiency. Leavis believes that this view leads to disregard for tradition and the common cultural order. Thus he uses this phrase as an attack on technologico-Benthamism; Snow is treated as a hubristic humanist as he extends his support to technological culture. Snow is ignoring the individual and is concentrating on the social whereas Leavis is retaining the value of the individual so that he is not submerged in the mass-mechanized society. The author concludes that both Snow and Leavis make purposive statements, speak at different ends and acknowledge different principles. Therefore there is a need to work on the basis of co-operation for the sake of mutual benefit. As Snow says, it is impossible to retreat into a non-technological Eden. He also points out that the Christian view implies an invincible ignorance in man. Leavis is a traditionalist and his values are shadows of Christian values. The author says that Arnold, Eliot, I. A. Richards, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Charles Dickens and Blake are one in their temperament and the critical outlook of Leavis is mostly derived from them.

Actually the controversy presents a conflict between two different world views, one deifying life and the other devaluing it. The evolutionary emergence of ideas like affirmation and negation has a historical basis. For example, the early Greek and the Karma Kanda of the Vedic period present the total importance of life-in-matter while the later Greek and the Gnana Kanda of the Vedic period project an exaggerated significance of life-in-spirit only as a

reaction to the former tendency. One extreme provokes the other extreme. The truth does not lie in the extremities but somewhere between them. This is the view of Sri Aurobindo as revealed in *The Life Divine*. Therefore the hostility between science and literature is the result of an unresolved hostility between matter and spirit. Leavis's vision is one facet of the unity of human consciousness and monocular. The only way to get rid of this defect is to proceed to a new awareness by a change of consciousness or in other words to get one's mind spiritually illumined.

The two subjects, Literature and Science, engage themselves in different kinds of work and the laws that shape them also vary. The purpose of literature is to rid the soul of its crass element and improve its sensibilities. On the other hand the work of science lies in improving the external condition of man. Both men of science and men of literature set out, as Snow says, to help humanity through different means but without a proper understanding of each other. Spiritual excellence is considered greater than material development. But Snow felt that with the problems of starvation, hunger and unemployment remaining unsolved, the entire human race is in peril. While the traditionalists like Leavis argue that the best achievements have already been made, Snow holds that the best achievements are yet to be made. This is actually in agreement with Sri Aurobindo, who says in his essay 'Materialism' in *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth* that the best achievements of all civilizations were admirable in their ensemble but their weakness lay in their exclusiveness of vision. He further says: "Progress is the very heart of the significance of human life.... Outward progress was the greater part of its aim and inward is the more essential, but the inward too is not complete if the outward is left out of account... without the inner realization the outer attempt at liberty may prove at last a vain thing."

Sri Aurobindo is accepted as a unifying principle between Snow and Leavis, for he combines both and makes a synthesis. The modern world presents a chaotic scene in which what one set of people say about life is totally irrelevant to what another set says. Instead of an integrated and complete life, disintegration or fragmentation of values is the order of the day. This process of fragmentation has affected every field of knowledge. As an attempt at the synthesis of all the fragmented elements of the unity of consciousness, Sri Aurobindo has shown concessions to both the groups (Snow and Leavis) where they deserve. Transcendence of the personal and positional strife, to avoid fighting for the sake of ideological stances, avoidance of the narrow and exclusive spirit, withdrawing approval where it is not due and giving it where it is due, an effort to avoid ill-feeling and put matters right—these are some of the qualities that constitute the highest mark of culture. Broadly speaking this is the spirit of Sri Aurobindo in all his writings. And it is this spirit we are badly in need of to get into new realms of inquiry so as to discover a solution more satisfying than those suggested by Lawrence and Leavis. Sri Aurobindo balances the two views in the interest of truth, whole and entire.

Sri Aurobindo considers the materialist's denial of 'spirit' less serious than the ascetic's refusal of 'matter'. Lakshminarayanan conclusively remarks: "What is sacrificed in this conflict is the wholeness of perception and balance of judgement." The way out lies in the middle course suggested by Sri Aurobindo. In the words of the author, "Sri Aurobindo would maintain that both reactions are extremes and the ideal man is one who is brave as a lion and tender as a woman.... The true basis for life lies in both reason and emotion as they are to co-operate in the ultimate scheme of life."

The author explains difficult concepts in a lucid style. He is not dogmatic and moves slowly but surely towards the reconciliation of opposed views. Since the central argument encompasses many disciplines, coherence is the main casualty. Frequent repetitions sometimes irritate the reader. However, the interesting argument holds his attention on. The book lacks tightness. What I have attempted here is to say precisely what is the point. After reading the book one becomes hopeful that it may serve its purpose of trying to restore unity to the modern fragmented view of the world.

D. GNANASEKARAN

The Indian Spirit by M. P. Pandit, Dipti Publications, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry-605 002. Paperback Price Rs. 30, pages viii + 150.

Ever since Swamy Vivekananda spoke in the Parliament of Religions there has been an ever increasing desire throughout the world to know more and more about India. It was partly satisfied with the timely publication of *Gitanjali*, a poetic account of the different facets of the Indian religious thought which has won the Nobel Prize for Tagore. Many of us are under the impression that the greatness of India lies in the profound metaphysics and its treatment of the world as 'Maya'.

The Indian Spirit by Shri M. P. Pandit, one of the prominent disciples of Sri Aurobindo, gives a comprehensive scientific view about India and how Indian Metaphysics is translated into action. India is not merely a land of forests with sages evolving different pathways into the realm of truth, but also very much concerned with "Ritam", i.e., Truth in action. Pandit gives a manifold insight into the core of the Indian psyche to the satisfaction of inquiring minds.

The first part of the book contains five lectures and they look like the majestic flow of the river Ganges in their depth of thought and clarity of expression. Just as a dip in the Ganges is said to purify every man from all earthly blemishes, readers in whatever walk of life they may belong to are sure to be freed from narrow-minded petty considerations and emerge as lovers of truth. For example, though many of us profess to be secular in our outlook our hearts secretly chant for a religious state to counterbalance the militant religious fervour of our neighbours. He exposes the fallacy underlying this attitude with a

convincing statement that the religions began to decline only when they became state religions. He cites the instances of Buddhism and Jainism which began to deteriorate only when kings supported them. But the Hindu religion on the other hand stood all alone like a rock withstanding many onslaughts from time immemorial. The author describes how the Indian mind is always kept open to absorb new ideas and ideals. India in its complete preoccupation with spirituality has erroneously side-lined the boons of matter which is also a part of Brahman. He says that technological progress is the sign of ever growing largeness of consciousness affording more and more time for improving spirituality. Many of the Educationalists complain about the delinquent children who rebel against the existing norms. The author looks at the problem from a different angle and says that the world is in the great throes of a transition and the children who really think find the present-day set-up outmoded and irrelevant in the modern context and they find themselves ill at ease in the void left and they require careful guidance from experts so that they may become great thinkers and leaders in future. In the lecture on the Time-Spirit he draws the beautiful analogy that great men are the instruments of the Time-Spirit to bring conducive changes in the society and they are cast aside into the dust-bin of history, when once they became selfish, sacrificing the larger interests of the nation. This holds good in many of the instances that are found in history. The author while discussing the unity of India instils an optimistic attitude saying that India can never be balkanised though political forces succeed temporarily, for the Indian spirit remains the same throughout this sub-continent.

The book contains several points of topical interest such as communism, parties in India, family planning, bandh, etc., and they look like the small waves of the Ganges touching the banks making a soft musical sound whispering to us that every aspect of the world is permeated by the divine love and the man-made problems cease to be problems when they are tackled without the self interfering in the process.

It is the outcome of wide experience and profound religious thought where the dichotomy between the world and the spirit is absent and all life is treated like the mellifluous song of the Almighty, each one of us chanting the refrain 'Such is Thy pleasure' at every stage of life.

The book is well brought out with the form of the Indian national flag as its cover pages suggesting that the book is about India both in the form and in the spirit.

Everyone who wants to know about the inscape of 'INDIA' and all the educationalists, social workers, administrators and politicians will find this book illuminating and instructive, for every aspect dealt with is made to pass through the vestibule of Truth.

V. GURU NADHA SARMA

Students' Section

THE NEW AGE ASSOCIATION

27th Annual Conference

12 August 1990

Speech by Hema Shah

THE PURPOSE OF DIFFICULTIES AND THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEM

At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful. We are well aware of the chaotic world-condition. We see the same ignorant humanity, still “a hard, crude and vile ore”¹, which will have to be hammered into shape if the ideal put forward by Sri Aurobindo has to be attained. Apart from these adverse external conditions, we are constantly, at every step, confronted with internal difficulties, obstacles, sufferings, calamities and ordeals, and sometimes they even increase and refuse to yield in spite of our endeavour to overcome them. We are thus compelled to fight with ourselves. Every time an aspiration for progress, for change, for wanting to come out from our lower self awakens, the difficulties multiply and assail and overwhelm us.

Why do they arise? What is the purpose of their coming? Firstly, because our nature is still crude and we need blows to awaken us from our inertia and to make progress. Difficulties come as blows to goad us forward on our path towards a luminous future. They arise so long as there is some defect in our nature and they help us to overcome that defect and throw it out of our being. Difficulties are pointed reminders of the weak points in our nature and occasions for overcoming them and moving forward on the path. They act as a stimulus to hasten our progress. Difficulties are our testing-ground to see how far we have strength and can endure and have faith in ourselves and in the Divine. Difficulties give us a chance to become strong and courageous to face and fight the various obstacles on all fronts of life. They make us conscious of the deeper realities of our life, and provide us with the key to turn inward, to live within, to reorientate our life in the light of the spirit. Difficulties thus serve as real opportunities for our progress. They bring in challenges and goad man to outgrow himself, discover a deeper reality in himself. Difficulties show us exactly where we stand. The extent and intensity of them are not only a measure of the progress we have to make but also a sign of the progress actually made. They become the gateway for self-discovery and self-perfection. They do not come

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Thoughts and Glances* (1970 edition), p 27

just by accident but have some purpose behind them, because if they had not come the action of progress would have been incomplete. For all the defects in our nature have to be faced and worked out, in order that nothing may be left to rise up hereafter. And finally difficulties are sent to us exclusively to make the realisation more complete, to make us stronger, more conscious and more perfect.

But this is not to say that we must invite difficulties. Difficulties come all by themselves when the time is ripe and we should be ready to face them. To overcome them may take a very long time, for it is a laborious task. Therefore a strong constitution, a well-developed personality and a solid mind and nerves are required. But along with difficulties we are also provided with proportionate strength to face them. The difficulties would never appear if there was no capacity in us to face them and outgrow our limitations.

After knowing the purpose behind difficulties, now let us see what attitude we should take towards them and how we should face them.

Nobody likes difficulties, for they are annoying and painful, but they are indispensable, for they are a help to our progress. Therefore instead of running away from them despairing, doubting one's own capacity and the help of the Divine Grace, we should perceive their meaning and face them courageously with unwavering faith in the Divine's working. In cases where difficulties are unavoidable and we have no choice but to undergo them, what is the use of getting depressed and revolting, for it can help in no way; instead we should adopt a healthier attitude which will make things lighter and easier. With our common sense we know that to achieve anything that is worth having we have to struggle against obstacles. Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*, "None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell." The nearer we arrive to our goal, the difficulties too become more numerous and intense. We know that night is darkest before the dawn. Whatever they may be, difficulties are only a part of the game and in spite of all the hurdles they raise, we the children of immortality are sure to win. Sri Aurobindo gives us this assurance, that if somebody has a hundred difficulties it means he will have a tremendous realisation—provided, of course, there are in him patience and endurance and he keeps the aspiring flame of Agni burning against those defects. "And remember: The Grace of the Divine is generally proportioned to your difficulties."²

Along with this a quiet mind for the descent of the Divine's Grace is necessary, and with it there must be an attitude of total detachment towards one's difficulties as though they were not one's own but in the care of the Divine Mother. Other basic necessities are, firstly, to be conscious of one's own self, then to understand the real cause why the difficulties are there, then to reject them firmly and persistently, and finally, after keeping a strong unwavering will, to follow the truth in face of the hardest physical, vital or mental ordeals and to

² *Mother India*, May 1965, p 6

surrender all one's difficulties to the Divine for him to do what is best. If our attitude is right and if we can face all the difficulties with courage and fortitude, with patience, endurance, humility and calm resignation, then it will itself greatly minimise their intensity. Sri Aurobindo says, "The difficulties that come are ordeals and tests and if one meets them in the right spirit, one comes out stronger and spiritually purer and greater."³

I end my talk with two most inspiring citations from Sri Aurobindo:

"In the unseen providence of things our greatest difficulties are our best opportunities. A supreme difficulty is Nature's indication to us of a supreme conquest to be won and an ultimate problem to be solved."⁴

"In the way that one treads with the greater Light above, even every difficulty gives its help and has its value and Night itself carries in it the burden of the Light that has to be."⁵

³ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 24), p 1639

⁴ *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 20), p 7

⁵ *Letters on Yoga* (Cent Ed , Vol 24), p 1638